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Tasmanian pioneer
Jack Thwaites

Yengo's
'highway of sand'

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Zero tolerance policy

Wild
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Cover Kim Ely takes a pause to absorb the beauty of alpine-ash forest in Victoria's Dargo River region.
Stephen Curtain

WARNING
The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



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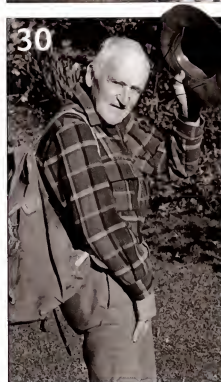
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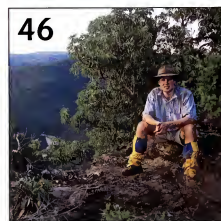
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Paying the price

Suing ourselves off the face of the earth

OUTDOORS ACTIVITIES, NO STRANGERS TO threats, are facing their gravest challenge at present. From whom: vengeful loggers? rapacious land-clearers? draconian bureaucrats? No, from ourselves!

The mindset we have adopted that holds someone else responsible for each and every misfortune we suffer, no matter how trivial or how much we contributed to it, and our determination that someone has to pay for it, preferably excessively so, is at the root of the problem. It's a natural consequence of a widespread, growing and fundamental failure to accept personal responsibility: the 'I have rights, others have responsibilities (to me)' mentality.

For some, even this is not enough. They go so far as to feign injury or loss, allegedly a consequence of an event that would be questionable in itself without the further indignity of such outright fraud.

I refer specifically to the rising number of legal claims for financial compensation made against others arising out of outdoors activities including those covered by Wild. (They affect far more activities than these, of course.) Most such claims end up with insurers who, not unreasonably, are significantly increasing their premiums for this type of cover or refusing it altogether.

Not only instructors and adventure travel operators are feeling it. Clubs are similarly affected. Blue Mountains Clifcare and the Western Victorian Climbing Club, for example, have both recently ceased operation because of this issue. All bushwalking, and other outdoors clubs face a similar threat. Land managers of National Parks and other places where we practise our favourite recreation are particularly exposed to litigation. Their response has greatly harmed the wilderness: signs and barriers are being erected in their thousands; 'suspect' trees are felled; tracks are rerouted; further controls and regulations are introduced; resources are diverted from more pressing conservation needs, and so on. The effect is severe and ongoing diminution of the wilderness experience.


Many of the claims would be laughable were they not so costly. Claims, not all of them successful, have arisen from cases including: a drunk ignoring warning signs, clambering over a safety barrier and falling from a cliff; a woman wearing patently inappropriate footwear allegedly injuring her foot while walking on a four-wheel-drive track; a not-so-happy camper suffering alleged property damage from a falling branch (the land manager subsequently felled every tree in the camping ground); and a rock climber, allegedly injured after being drop-

ped by his inexperienced climbing partner, suing a more experienced climber who had helped them earlier in the day, had long departed the scene and was not in any way responsible for the accident. And on it goes...

The situation has not been helped by 'ambulance-chasing' lawyers, particularly those soliciting and encouraging potential clients with the lure of 'no win, no fee'. Common practice is to claim an excessive amount, out of all proportion to the alleged loss or injury. The insurer is obliged to embark on potentially very costly and protracted legal defence and is susceptible to offers to settle out of court for a fraction of

**'signs and barriers are
being erected in their
thousands; "suspect"
trees are felled;
tracks are rerouted'**

the original claim, even when the insurer considers that the litigant's case is without foundation. In such cases the insurer is certain to face considerable costs if proceeding to court; the insurer may win the case but not costs against the litigant, and even if costs are awarded against them, in many cases the insurer is unable to extract payment from the litigant. As a consequence, insurance premiums rise generally (to cross-subsidise the cost to insurers of providing this type of indemnity insurance), and cover is reduced.

Apart from a sea change in personal standards—which is not likely, at least not overnight—what can be done about this rapidly deteriorating situation? Legislative change appears to be the only course. Wanton or flagrant negligence should be exempted, but steps might be taken to exclude frivolous or otherwise obviously inappropriate claims, to emphasise the principle of personal responsibility (particularly in adventure activities) and to impose reasonable limits on claims. In addition, this field might be handed over to government to administer in much the same way as motor-accident claims were some years ago with a resultant substantial drop in claims. In the meantime we might all consider improving our understanding of the meaning of personal responsibility and practise it. 

Chris Baxter



"Look at Hepatitis. He thinks he's one bad virus."

"Yeah. It's enough to make you sick."



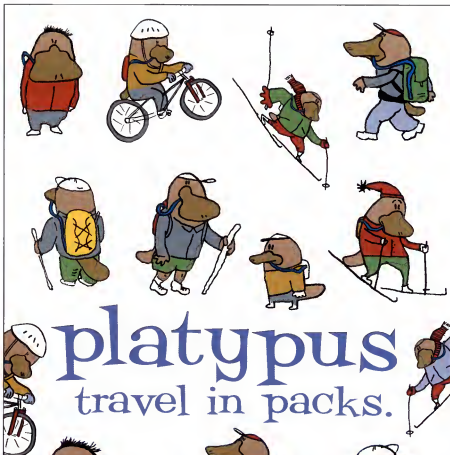
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Take the Wollemi pine out of your own eye first

'The Quest' backlash lashed

I HAVE JUST RECEIVED MY COPY OF *WILD* no 83 and write to register my disapproval of the campaign against your magazine, your editors and the author of the article 'The Quest' (*Wild* no 82). I read the article without strong feelings either for or against its publication, but if I were now pressed for an opinion I would say that your publishing it was a correct decision on your part and not the heinous ethical crime your correspondents seem to think it was. A reading of the letters supports your claim in your defence (Editorial, *Wild* no 83) that this was a campaign initiated by a few people 'stirring the possum'.

I am surprised by the vehemence of some of the letters. It would seem that freedom of speech is not very highly regarded by some in the 'conservation movement'. From that point alone you were justified in publishing the article, especially as it reported an event which had already taken place. (By analogy our daily newspapers should not report crimes and such like because by doing so they may encourage others to do likewise.)

As for the National Parks & Wildlife Services' self-righteous pontification on the matter, I laughed. The same government department which, more than most walkers, breaks its own rules and regulations to the detriment of the environment. On countless occasions I have been angered and saddened by the decisions of the NPWS and the actions of some of its officers.

I, for one, will be continuing my subscription to your excellent magazine.

Andrew Allen
(by email)

In the face of what simply appears to be a well-written, honest account of three fellow bushwalkers' determination to find the Wollemi pine, *Wild*'s decision to publish the article is both justified and inspiring.

For the majority of thinking people, the article provided a tribute to the pines as well as an entertaining insight into the park's provocative and intricate landscape. To suggest the article '...will only encourage others to look for the pines...' and indeed '...damage the credibility [bushwalkers] have with NSW Government departments' is laughable!

It is believed the majority of my fellow bushwalkers and outdoor enthusiasts at large are a little more discerning than the authors of the letters published. One would hope without question that we jointly share the views of environmental protection and responsibility that *Wild* unfailingly highlights.

Does *Wild* have to be on guard with every comment made, or article published, in case some 'idiot' out there interprets some dan-

condemnation! I received several offensive circular emails, most of the senders of which had clearly not read the article carefully, if at all. As this phenomenon doesn't occur so much outside the Volley-shod world, there was not a word from my non-NSW club...

I chose not to join the (self) righteous chorus because the reasons for publication you cite in issue 83 were a little self-evident...I renewed my subscription after reading the article, and I see I have

another great issue to race through, then savour slowly.

Thank you, *Wild*; when I'm stuck in the city, your issues keep reminding and inspiring me!

A bushwalker
Sydney, NSW

...I read your article on the Wollemi pine in *Wild* no 82 with great interest as did many others. My first reaction was why would a respected magazine print an article given the importance of the safety and delicacy of these majestic trees. However, whilst reading the article it dawned on me that the article provided information on the nature of the trees and their background that many did not know. As an avid and responsible bushwalker the thought of visiting the pines never crossed my mind.

To my interest, *Wild* no 83 printed numerous letters that the magazine received providing negative feedback on the article as printed. The fact that you printed these letters is a credit to the magazine and its Editor. Without feedback of this nature publications can get an air of indifference on subjects and lose objectivity. I applaud you for facing the maelstrom and treating it with the dignity it deserved. I know all readers will not be satisfied with your response but you have other subscribers and casual buyers who enjoyed reading the article for what it was...

Carl Smith
Newcastle, NSW

...A lot of the people who wrote in are accusing *Wild* of treachery for publishing such an article, and that such a story only encourages similar feats...but does not the responsibility of whether to embark on such a bushwalk lie with each individual bushwalker not a publication that has the



gerous hidden agenda? Those who have said 'goodbye' to *Wild* will obviously find comfort in reading *The Phantom*!

Geoff Beveridge
Wagga Wagga, NSW

I saw with some distaste the usual campaign from the disapprovers of the New South Wales walking and cross-country skiing brigade. Much hysteria about nothing, but easily come by if you spend your life being holier than thou.

Take heart, dear *Wild* folk. I lead walks for one NSW outdoors club and belong to a couple of others. I also lead cross-country ski trips for a non-NSW club. Whatever it is about the NSW scene, a few facts never seem to get in the way of a rattling good

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guts to publish such an article? After all, the silence of the publisher/editors speaks volumes of their neutrality in such matters; you can't be held accountable for every bushwalker who jumps the fence that states 'no entry', for I'm sure we're all guilty of that at some time... You're just a publication that lets similar minds know what goes on in the wild...! Let those who are without sin cast the first stone! I don't believe that such an article encourages bushwalkers to set out on such an expedition...

I can't see how publishing that article is...a blatant disregard for the environment...and in particular these unique trees' when *Wild* is so consciously active at preserving this planet—more so than some of these self-righteous letter writers. It's so easy to criticise when you're standing on the other side of the fence but, hey, maybe some of these people should go back to my first paragraph. Let's take responsibility for our own actions and not be so quick to cast the blame...we should take the Wollemi pine out of our own eye first before we point to the speck in others'!

Kind regards, keep up the good work.

Matt Smith
(by email)

...To publish an article relating what is now an illegal activity (even if it wasn't then) is indeed irresponsible...

If you 'strongly agree that the pines should not be visited' then you should never have published. Your disclaimer on page seven of that issue still doesn't take into account the fact that you consciously published an article which you profess to be against your beliefs. In this you are accountable...

However, the response by some of my fellow readers (and some non-readers, apparently) disgusted me. No matter what mistake *Wild* has made, terms seen in those letters were horrible and unnecessary. Conservation is a collaborative activity and the manner of the letters makes me wonder how committed the writers are to that.

I do believe *Wild*'s editorial team thought hard about this article (albeit making the wrong decision); however, it was never a cheap grab for publicity or readership. The article was positioned in the middle of the magazine, nowhere near the front where blockbuster articles are usually found. And its placement on the cover was bottom right, an area which receives little attention from readers or prospective buyers. (Being a design student, I base these comments on points made in my classes.)

Furthermore, in the same issue can be found one of the most electrifying Editorials I have ever read. I was so emotionally shattered after that, my measly student funds are now being poured into The Wilderness Society and the Australian Conservation Foundation.

To those people who have left the magazine (not that you'll read this) I think you're missing out. In the context of 20 years of conservation this was a slip-up; a badly managed and ill-considered one, but still nothing in terms of the thoughtless

destruction by corporate business and uneducated thrill-seekers to our world.

As for me, I will continue to read *Wild* and hope it will entertain, educate and inspire me for many more years to come.

Rachel Bucknall
Balwyn, Vic

In 'The Quest' (*Wild* no 82), the author refers to Gondwanaland twice. The ancient continent is Gondwana (Giant Land). Gondwanaland would mean 'Giant Land Land'.

Richard Fossett
(by email)

In your letters section for *Wild* no 83 already filled with vitriolic protests against 'The Secret Quest' [sic] or would you like another one!

Mark Hunter
(by email)

Effort

Thanks for all the great work that you do for conservation throughout this and every year.

Michael Fogarty
General Manager
Australian Conservation Foundation
Fitzroy, Vic

I recently renewed my subscription and took out the three-year option. I was lucky enough to win the Icebreaker outer garment that was offered for early renewal. It is such a warm garment that my wife has now claimed it...

I have every issue of *Wild* since day one and I find it a great reference/reading material. Congratulations on producing such an impressive magazine over the years.

David Charles
Wandana Heights, Vic

After coming across *Wild* some two years ago quite by accident and absorbing the adventures of past and present, you have slowly converted me into a bushwalker, explorer, mountain climber, adventurer. Well, perhaps the last three are more in my imagination... but I am proud to say that I devote much of my free time to bushwalking, mostly planning for holidays; this was largely inspired by your brilliant publications...

I have bought most of my equipment... after consulting your gear surveys—90 per cent of my acquisitions were influenced by reading your articles... I have read a few other outdoors magazines, but yours far exceeds them in quality and fulfilment; so much so that I would like to take out a three-year subscription.

Congratulations to you and your staff on 20 years of *Wild*. I look forward to more of the same. You should be very proud of your team.

John Gailans
Beldon, WA

Continuing the trend

I guess that you have received more than your fair share of complaints lately and, without wishing to continue this trend, I wanted

to make a comment regarding the article 'From Danae to Kanangra' in *Wild* no 83. Whilst these are both outstanding canyons and I'm sure Matt Chamberlain thoroughly enjoyed his trip, I felt that it was somewhat remiss not to indicate that these canyons are only suitable for competent, experienced parties. Of course, both canyons are rated as difficult and to complete both in a weekend is probably more than your average canyoneer could manage.

In a similar vein, I recall that *Wild* published an article about kayaking Yarrangobilly Cave a few years back (no 71) and, having met the local NPWS staff while on a caving trip, I learned that quite a number of people subsequently attempted this trip despite significant danger (log jams in the cave and fast-flowing water). The staff were quite concerned that the article had (perhaps unintentionally) encouraged people to attempt this trip.

I certainly wouldn't want to see a situation develop where the publication of articles about adventure activities is curtailed in order to protect people from themselves; however, I do think that there could be an accompanying warning to reduce the likelihood of accidents when inexperienced persons attempt these trips.

Thanks for a great magazine and I, unlike Alan Pryke (Wildfire, *Wild* no 83) will certainly be maintaining my subscription.

Ashley Kaar
Cairns, QLD

I am writing to express my dismay at the cover of *Wild* no 82. I find it hard to believe that this magazine could publish a photo that shows such blatant disregard for safety. Where is a rope and belay? A helmet? Is *Wild* so desperate for sales that it decides to put such 'glamorous' images on its cover for self-promotion?...

Mark Nott
Fairlight, NSW

Dead weight

A review of a large number of rucksacks in *Wild* no 83 showed almost all weigh more than two and half kilograms and some up to three and a half kilograms. This seems a lot of dead weight before carrying anything which contributes directly to what is needed for a bushwalk. It is worth looking for alternatives.

We had been planning to walk the Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT) from Walhalla to Canberra in one go. Last year we found ourselves with a choice of starting in the short daylight hours of May or postponing the trip. We decided to go ahead.

Fortunately we had been told by friends of the ultra-lightweight walking practices of the American, Ray Jardine. We made several items of lightweight gear to the specifications in his book *Beyond Backpacking* (AdventureLore Press, Oregon, 2000—ordered through Dymocks) including a rucksack. These proved essential to our completion of the walk in 34 days—not too bad, we thought, for a couple who are in their late fifties.

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Our packs weighed less than 400 grams each...Instead of a tent, we used a fly to Jardine's design weighing a kilogram and set up with dead sticks found at each campsite. We made a double sleeping-quilt which weighed a kilo. We were cool only on one night at Buckwong Creek when the frost formed at 8 pm and the temperature must have fallen to minus five degrees. We were very careful of clothing weight (Leonie made a Gore-Tex anorak weighing less than 400 grams)...

Phillip Bubb
Braddon, ACT

Quentin's mate

For years now, the first bit of *Wild* that I read—usually within ten minutes of the new edition arriving—is the column by Quentin Chester. Further, it's a column I read again, and invariably find myself talking about, or referring to with somebody or other.

I find myself on Quentin's wavelength time and again. Indeed, on more than one occasion someone had asked whether I actually wrote the column, using Quentin's name! The article in *Wild* no 82, 'Peak Obsession', mirrors my own experience and feelings almost exactly, right down to being inspired by the Heysen painting of Patawanta...

Keep up the good work with *Wild*. It's a magazine I treasure—and I have all 82!...

Alan Dutton
(by email)

Measure for measure

I write this measured response to the article written by Brigitte Muir (*Wild* no 82), about her husband Jon's recent south-north traverse of Australia. In what was a description of a great achievement by Jon, unfortunately time was set aside for questioning the unsupported nature of my recent successful crossing of the Great Victoria Desert with Peter Treseder.

The unsupported trips I undertake involve carrying everything needed to survive, taking nothing from the local environment, as was the case with the Great Victoria crossing. Jon's recent unsupported trip by contrast involved carrying very little in the way of supplies and his gathering all food and water needed to survive from the local environment. Both types of trips are unsupported in their own way, both have their merits, and both certainly involve intense hardship.

Instead of questioning different interpretations of 'unsupported', why can't we just get on with doing these trips and congratulate one another for attempting them in the first place, rather than pointlessly and—let's face it—pretty shamefully knocking the legitimate achievements of others?

Tim Jarvis
Adelaide, SA

Readers' letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

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That run

'It's that run. That's the killer. That's what puts this event right up there among the toughest endurance events in the world.'

This event is the Jones Lang LaSalle Challenge, a 231 kilometre run, cycle and paddle event from the Victorian ski resort Mt Buller to Melbourne at the end of November. The speaker? John Jacoby, the 36-year-old veteran of many New Zealand Coast to Coast races, Eco Challenges and other multi-sports endurance events. Jacoby, a Geelong banker in his other life, has entered the Jones Lang LaSalle Challenge on four previous occasions and won it every time. This year he was back after a two-year absence.

The first seven kilometres of the 33 kilometre run drop through 1300 vertical metres, starting with a headlong rush down the highest ski-run on the mountain, through winding, narrow mountain tracks, then down an ankle-wrenching ridgeline where runners slow to a walk.

Once down on the Howqua River valley floor competitors cross the river 15 times in about ten kilometres. When the river is up it can be hazardous and competitors link arms as they stumble across slippery rocks to the opposite bank. After emerging from the river the runners face a nine kilometre run along an undulating track, then a further seven kilometres along a gravel road.

The second leg is a 20 kilometre paddle across Lake Eildon to Jerusalem Creek, a daunting task when the wind is whipping up the waves. The final stage for the first day is a 57 kilometre road cycle through Taggerty and Buxton to Marysville.

The field included three previous winners but Jacoby was the first across the line on day one. Last year's winner, Tasmanian Matt Dalziel, kept pace throughout the run, attacked on the water and opened up a one-and-a-quarter minute lead over Jacoby, then watched that advantage disappear as Jacoby powered away on the first major hill of the cycle leg to finish 5 minutes and 16 seconds ahead of the field.

Three former winners of the women's event battled it out for the first-day finish; defending champion Karen Hopkinson of Melbourne was first with a 33-minute lead over Tasmanian Genevieve Duncan, the 1998 champion. Kiwi Sharon Prutton, the 1995 winner, was third.

The second day of the Jones Lang LaSalle Challenge also starts with a run on 20 kilometres of logging tracks from Marysville to Dom Dom Saddle. Jacoby extended his lead on Dalziel by 1 minute 46 seconds on the run, then grabbed a



The winner of the women's race, Karen Hopkinson.



Matt Dalziel, left, and John Jacoby run together. Right, Dalziel leads eventual winner Jacoby to the finish line in the final leg of the Jones Lang LaSalle Challenge. All photos Tom Putt



further two-minute buffer on the cycle leg, a 73 kilometre ride through the Yarra Valley to Ivanhoe.

After the restart for the final 28 kilometre paddle down the Yarra to Princes Bridge, the two paddled side by side; the Tasmanian was aware that he had no hope of making up what was by then an eight-minute deficit and seemed content to help his rival try for the race record.

It ended as it has four times before: Jacoby was the winner by 8 minutes and 55 seconds. Dalziel was second and Carlton student Brett Anderson was third. Jacoby completed the course in 12 hours, 36 minutes and 3 seconds, breaking the old record by more than 18 minutes and finishing just 13-and-a-half minutes slower than the fastest six-person team.

Hopkinson also set a new race record of 14 hours 53 minutes 24 seconds to win her third women's title in a row and finish in a very impressive tenth place overall. Second place went to Duncan; Prutton was third.

Of the 75 starters, nine had abandoned the race after that run on the first day; another four had been unable to take their place at the second-day start. Seven had taken more than seven hours to complete the distance from Mt Buller to Eildon.

As Jacoby says, it's that run.
Barry White



Photo: Mark Sisson

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Improving with age

Like a good wine, rogaining and rogainers get better with age! At the 25th anniversary of rogaining and the Victorian Championships on 1–2 December 2001, veteran teams won seven of the first eight placings. Veterans Derek Morris and Kevin Humphrey were overall winners with 2830 points—clear winners over Peter Reid and Richard Miller (2460 points)

Bifano (2090 points). They were followed by veterans Tony Perrott and Liz Wood (2050 points) and Martina and Stephen Honey (2040 points). The women's event was also dominated by veterans. June Tickell and Joanne van Leeuwen (1650 points) finished ahead of Julie Flynn and Deb Moreheart (1500 points). A great first-up performance was put in by Hania

Rogaining 'heavies':
from left, Chris Solnordal
(Victorian Rogaining
Association President),
Rod Phillips (co-origina-
tor of rogaining), Peter
Taylor (South Australian
Rogaining Association
President), Neil Phillips
(International Rogaining Federation President) and Phil Holman
(Australian Rogaining Association President). Solnordal collection



and Rob Tucker and Ross Dawson (2450 points). More than 400 competitors took part in the 24-hour championship and a special anniversary six-hour event. Victorian president Chris Solnordal said: 'Rogaining is as strong as ever. Including this event, we have a record number of competitors in Victoria this year.' The mixed event was won by non-veterans Grant Smith, Sarah Pittendrigh and Jesse

Lada and Dianne Young, who came third with 1170 points. Other competitors included the Australian president, Phil Holman, and the International president, Neil Phillips. Rod Phillips also competed. He and Neil contributed two thirds of the name 'rogaine', which is a combination of the first names of the inventors—Rod, Gail and Neil.

John Gavens and Heather Leslie

Coastal challenge

Eighteen-year-old David Hyde's alternative to Surfers Paradise for his post-year-12 schoolies week was certainly a departure from teenage tradition. He traversed 275 kilometres in 11 coastal National Parks between Sydney and Brisbane in 44 hours and 45 minutes during five-and-a-half days on 24–29 November 2001. He was solo for all but 30 kilometres of the distance. The National Parks included in the expedition (in order) were: Sydney Harbour, Bouddi, Wyrabalong, Tomaree, Myall Lakes, Booti Booti, Crowdy Bay, Hathead, Yuraygir, Bundjalung and Broadwater. In the last two days of the trip Hyde completed 153 kilometres in 20 hours. 'It's amazing how fast you can run when you are wet, hungry and scared', was the way he explained it.

David Hyde on the coast in
Broadwater National Park with three
kilometres left to complete his
traverse through 11 coastal National
Parks between Sydney and Brisbane.
Richard Tyler



Tabletop century

A group of walkers from Toowoomba, Queensland, has made 100 ascents of a local peak, Tabletop Mountain, during 2001. The Toowoomba *Chronicle* reports on 30 November. Mark Kaddatz, Joe Ciantar and Keith Treschman got up at six in the morning twice a week for almost a year to reach the goal they had set themselves during a 12-day bushwalk in Victoria at the start of 2001.

A new loo with a view

A two-storey toilet has been built next to Federation Hut near Mt Feathertop in the Victorian Alps. While Parks Victoria should be commended for the environmentally friendly composting toilet which replaced the old pit toilet, its sheer size and placement are questionable. The toilet has four doors, two sets of steps, is similar in size to Federation Hut and it is highly visible from the Cross to High Knob. I wonder why it could not have been built to the right of the hut and face the Owens valley instead—hence not be visible to walkers on the mountain. It seems as though it was placed where it was easiest to build and service; visual pollution was not taken into account.

John Chapman

Alpine paddling accident

On 27 October 2001 a party of kayakers paddled the grade 4+/4-pub Cobunga River, which drains the slopes of Mt Hotham in the Victorian Alps. The water was considered neither too 'bony' nor too pushy. The group had several very experienced paddlers with rescue training. They negotiated the more difficult six kilometre stretch between Smiths Crossing and the Blue Duck Inn without difficulty and had lunch. Afterwards they launched their boats for the lower stretch, another three kilometres or so to the confluence with the grade 3 Mitta Mitta River. This stretch is usually considered somewhat easier; the grade 2 first half ends abruptly in a string of small, steep drops but the entry drop and the exit are the most challenging. Afterwards comes a rocky, steep rapid that many portage, followed by a horseshoe waterfall and the exit rapids into the Mitta Mitta River.

In the section of small, steep drops, two paddlers went off to retrieve a lost boat—the swimmer had reached the shore safely. After scouting, the third paddler followed through the last drop before the difficult section, saw that the boat was retrieved and turned to spot for the man behind, 27-year-old Andrea Cocchiaglia. He had paddled this section before, had rescue training and gear and was paddling his 'conservative' RPM kayak well that day.

Unfortunately, on looking back upstream, the scout could see that only Cocchiaglia's head was visible in a foam pillow coming

off a large boulder that was blocking the bottom of the rapid. The third paddler left his boat on shore and scrambled back upstream where he was joined by the other members of the party. After numerous dangerous and heroic attempts to rescue Cocchiaglia, and long after all signs of struggle ceased, the exhausted group made the difficult decision to paddle out before dark and get help. As testimony to the difficulty of the pin it took several days for the experienced and capable Melbourne water police to retrieve Cocchiaglia's remains.

It seems that this was one of 'those things' where no smoking gun presents itself for blame. The water and the day were ostensibly perfect, the paddler and his colleagues were in fine fettle and experienced. There was no rush, people scouted. Perhaps it was a lost stroke while bracing over the drop; perhaps the water was taking him left when he'd decided to head to the right. We will never know. What is clear is that Cocchiaglia hit the rock with such force that it pinned him back and completely prevented access to the pull cord for his spray skirt. This extraordinary circumstance alone would have been enough.

Jeffie Aronson

SCROGGING

✦ An obituary of **Bruce Heckinger** appeared in *The Australian* newspaper on 20 November 2001. American-born—he was described in the obituary as a musician, adventurer and activist—Heckinger died in New South Wales on 22 October, aged 50. Long-term readers may recall his article in *Wild* no 4 describing his early solo descent of Tasmania's Franklin River. Heckinger wrote that he saw no one for 11 days, and made an


impassioned appeal for the preservation of 'Tasmania's last wild river', for which he campaigned so hard.

✦ Six Australian teams competed in New Zealand's most famous adventure race, the **Southern Traverse**, near Queenstown on 12–17 November 2001. The 320 kilometre course includes a multitude of outdoors disciplines such as mountain trekking, white-water kayaking, abseiling and mountain biking. The race was won by local Queenstown team Edge Orienteering in 95 hours and 36 minutes.

✦ The **Mild Seven Outdoor Quest Adventure Race** was held in China in November 2001. The race includes seven disciplines: biathlon (run and cycle); off-road in-line skating; lake paddling; trail running; river kayaking; adventure skills (high rope and rappelling); and mountain biking. Australian team Mountain Designs—**Gary Sutherland, Guy Andrews, Jody Mielke and Novak Thomson**—was third in a field of 32.

✦ A new **adventure race series** is to be launched this year. **Maximum Adventure** will hold three events in NSW in May, August and November. Solo competitors, pairs or teams will take part in five activities during two-day events. Competitors will attempt a cross-country orienteering course (on foot) a night-navigation course, canoeing, a 15 kilometre run and a mountain-bike orienteering challenge. For further information, see www.maxadventure.com.au

Readers' contributions to this department, including colour slides, are welcome. Typed items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.



Wild Diary

Wild Diary listings provide information about rucksack sports events and instruction courses run by non-commercial organisations. Send items for publication to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

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23	Autumn 5 hr R	23–25	National May Outdoor Trade Show, Canberra (traders only)	6	Best of Banff Mountain Film Festival, Metro Theatre, Sydney	15–16	2 x 6 hr R	19–21	Pump 'n' Pedals Cairns Ex Adventure Race M
23–24	12 hr R	25–26	12/24 hr R	15–19	Maximum Adventure Race Series M	16	6 hr R	20–21	24 hr SA Championships R
20, 21	2 x 6 hr R	25–26	12/24 hr R	23–28	24 hr Australian Rogaining Championships R	22–23	12/24 hr NT Championships R		
27	Autumn 12 hr R	24–26	Oxham Trailwalker 100 kilometre			22–23	Winter 24 hr R		
27–28	24 hr Australian Rogaining Championships R			8	Best of Banff Mountain Film Festival, Capitol Theatre, Melbourne				
				15–19	Maximum Adventure Race Series M				
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Rogaining events are organised by the State roaining associations



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Victoria's Toughest

Chris Baxter dons his gaiters and wades into this thorny subject

THE AUSTRALIAN MAINLAND'S SMALLEST and most densely populated State is not one you would readily associate with tough bushwalking. It may come as a surprise then that there are many places in Victoria that have perhaps never been visited by humans.

Already I sense some of you preparing to scoff at such an unlikely—if not downright ridiculous—notion. As there is no part of Victoria that cannot be reached from Melbourne in a weekend (returning that same weekend may be another matter), I can sympathise with this sentiment. But it's true. There are such places, and I don't mean tiny, isolated pockets overlooked solely because of their insignificance. On the contrary, there are major geographical features that would offer relatively long and sustained trips for the most battle-hardened and world-weary bushwalker. This article, no doubt, will produce a flood of letters telling me in no uncertain terms how 'every man and his dog' has visited the places I have nominated since time immemorial.

Before listing some examples, here is a chance to work up your sense of anticipation by considering some key characteristics of untracked and rarely visited places.

Obviously, *distance* from population centres and from vehicle access plays a role in determining which are the most inaccessible places. When distance is combined with other geographical obstacles such as significant topographical variation you are more likely to find rarely visited places. The time and energy required to get to them, not to mention the difficulty of being rescued or even found in the event of an emergency, means that they are not for everyone. However, distance from roads is not sufficient to ensure that a place is seldom visited—there must be additional deterrents.

The most effective of these is undoubtedly dense *vegetation*. Scrub is all the more effective as a natural barrier if it can 'bite back': every step is attained only by strenuous pushing and shoving to make a way and in the process you are bloodied by prickles, thorns or blades. If you have ever tried to fight your way through one of the dense thickets of blackberries that clog some river valleys in eastern Victoria you will know what I mean. Similarly, while they don't 'bite', teatree at Wilsons Promontory and mangrove swamps elsewhere can supply the proverbial 'full-body workout' for pitifully small returns in distance gained.

Cliffs are another deterrent to visitors. They don't need to be particularly tall to be effective; if they cannot be abseiled (or ascended) in a single rope-length, they are effective—particularly if, in addition, they are dangerously loose. Wet and vegetated rock also helps to reduce a cliff's appeal but cliffs make



East Gippsland's Little River Gorge is the home of waterfalls. Brian Walters is in the foreground. Walters collection. **Right**, the Little River is 'the track' in its gorge. Walters

the most effective barriers when they are extensive—and not easily bypassed. (Consider, for example, the part played by cliffs in hindering early exploration west of Sydney.)

The unavoidable presence of *water*, especially when it is fast moving and deep such as in the confined space of an inescapable gorge, is another effective natural deterrent. Many of us do not like to be submerged, particu-

larly if we are far from civilisation and have dry clothes and a sleeping-bag strapped to our back. This understandable aversion is intensified where drowning, being dashed against rocks and logs or swept over a waterfall are possible outcomes of a dip. Slippery, uneven and unstable surfaces are commonly associated with watercourses, particularly if on precipitous ground.

Country

A photograph of two hikers with large backpacks crossing a rocky stream with a small waterfall. One hiker is in the water, and the other is on the rocks. A third person's arm is visible on the right.

*...there are many places
in Victoria that have
perhaps never been
visited by humans.'*

Scrub, cliffs and water—especially when combined with remoteness—are the major factors affecting access to an area but there are others such as climate. Victoria may not be subject to the extreme heat of far north Queensland but at the very least its seasonal variations rule out visiting certain regions at certain times of the year. Extreme heat, lack of water, snow, and rivers swollen with spring snow melt may all serve as effective barriers at different times. As well as having defensive flora, some areas have their own defensive *fauna*: it is indeed a brave bushwalker who wades boldly into a snake-infested swamp at the height of summer!

When two or more of these elements occur in the same region, it is relatively inaccessible. Indeed, a *number* may occur together, as in the remote country of East Gippsland, where the combination of precipitous cliffs, raging water and dense scrub are the norm. Only those with the necessary determination, fitness and experience will ever get to such places.

is a good place to start. It contains steep and remote country, far from population centres. It is dissected by a number of major watercourses, many of them well away from tracks. The Little River Gorge, between the Snowy River and Wulgulmerang is a tough, multi-day trip in trackless terrain. All the elements discussed above are present—in spades! This rugged and spectacular region is relatively well known to experienced and hardy Victorian walkers, many of whom have sought it out for these very qualities. But while it is not unvisited it bears few signs of visitation.

we considered that we could not readily have gone upstream through the most constricted sections. Pity help you if you were bitten by a snake or suffered a serious accident! We saw no sign of human presence whatever between the high ridges on either side of Reedy Creek's catchment area.

Despite the fact that, after the Snowy, it is the major river in the region the Tambo River has failed to attract the attention of bushwalkers. Starting from Nunnington Plain, the south branch is a major watercourse that flows through extremely rugged country. It takes two hard and committing days to reach the only track that crosses the river between its source and pastoral land at Bindi Station. I know of only two descents of this section to the Garron Point Track—which entails negotiating waterfalls and swims, and passes close to a significant waterfall on Sawpit Creek just above its confluence with the Tambo. The river's course between this track and Bindi is just as remote and serpentine although slightly less steep and somewhat longer than that above the track. Locals do not know of any complete descent. (Paddling is out of the question.)



Mt Frederick is one of the high points of the arduous and scrubby Serra Range in the Grampians. John Chapman

A degree of suffering and exposure to risk is to be expected and that isn't everybody's idea of relaxing recreation.

The current drive to 'make wilderness accessible to everyone' seeks to remove the sort of natural barriers discussed in this article by building access roads and tracks, removing vegetation, bridging watercourses, constructing gangways on cliffs, erecting signs, and so on. However, this process is oxymoronic. By destroying wilderness and leaving a pale imitation of the natural order in its place, it will no longer be accessible to anyone.



Where, then, are Victoria's remotest places? As I have already suggested, East Gippsland



East Gippsland's Reedy Creek Chasm with the creek running at a low level (in April). Walters

When you are deep in its steep and scrubby confines, it's not hard to convince yourself that you are treading where no one has gone before! In fact, this is the most popular walk discussed in this article.

The fabled Reedy Creek Chasm, on a tributary of the Buchan River, is a scaled-down version of the Little River Gorge. While most experienced Victorian bushwalkers have heard of it, few have actually traversed it. Last November *Wild* co-founder Brian Walters and I entered Reedy Creek from the south, above the Chasm, waded down through it, and left the creek by heading north. It was an extraordinary wilderness experience. Given the relatively high water-level at the time and the unclimbable cliffs rising out of the water on both sides in some sections, we perceived it to be a one-way trip. Briefly swept off our feet by deep, fast-flowing water,



One of the original surveyors' cairns from the 1870s marking the New South Wales-Victoria border. Following them is one of the most demanding walks in south-east mainland Australia. This cairn is on the Berrima Range, East Gippsland. John Siseman

Not all the remote parts of East Gippsland involve water. Indeed, in some cases its *absence* contributes to their inaccessibility. *Wild* no 69 includes the account of an attempt to follow the Victoria-New South

Wales border from the headwaters of the Murray River to the coast at Conference Point near Cape Howe. This route was surveyed and marked with cairns between 1870 and 1872 but the party described in the *Wild* article experienced extreme scrub and very dry conditions. The group failed to complete the route, walking from the Barry Way to Mt Tingaringy. I know of only one

ive equipment and a helicopter he was never found. Almost any off-track walking away from rock or sand at the Prom is likely to be 'character building'. A traverse of the Prom's spine, over Mt Vereker, is a very demanding four-day undertaking. A handful of hardened bushwalkers have made this traverse but some other routes on the Prom are unlikely to have been attempted.

of the range, which itself is crossed by unsealed roads in two or three places! Yes, you're right, but I have not heard of even one party that has traversed the spectacular crest of the Serra Range in a single trip. *Wild* no 60 includes an account of an attempt by hardy and experienced bushwalkers to traverse only a short section of the range. They were thwarted, largely by the scrub, in



Wilsons Promontory's Mt Wilson is defended by some of Victoria's toughest scrub. Oberon Bay's friendly beach beckons tantalisingly—so near and yet so far! Chapman

party that has completed the traverse since it was surveyed; it made the trip in the 1950s and included pioneer bushwalkers Keith and Daphne McPherson. In addition to this marathon traverse are other dry and scrubby challenges in this wild region. A number of the peaks in Victoria's far east, for example, although not lofty, have some serious scrub and are rarely visited.

Wilsons Promontory has been famous for more than a century for its unspoilt, bush-backed beaches and granite outcrops. It also has some prominent peaks. Serious bushwalkers have long stood in awe of 'the Prom's' impenetrable scrub, where progress is measured in *metres*, rather than kilometres. In 1987 an intellectually disabled nine-year-old boy, Patrick Hildebrand, disappeared when walking with his mother on the Lilly Pilly Gully tourist track, a short distance from a sealed road. Despite a protracted search by hundreds of people, sniffer dogs, heat-sensit-

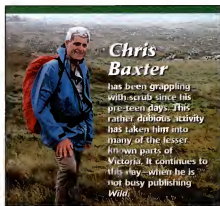
You would not be likely to associate the Grampians with rarely visited and inaccessible places. However, among the numerous unclimbed cliffs in Victoria including in East Gippsland and the north-east, there are many in that island of bush in western Victoria, the Grampians. Not only are no ascents recorded but they bear no sign of human contact.

Cliffs are not the only unvisited places in the Grampians—known for its pesky scrub—and some of its corners are rarely visited although they are not far from roads and tracks. The scrub is not as thick as the worst at Wilsons Promontory but what it lacks in density it makes up in scratchiness. In addition, the region can be one of the hottest and driest in the State and it is probably the one most infested with cliffs. To the eye of the discerning bushwalker, one Grampians range stands out. Sweeping in a single, giant, crosscut-saw blade of serrated peaks for 80 kilometres from Mt Rosea in the north to Mt Sturgeon in the south, the Serra Range is an obvious and outstanding challenge. To liken it to Tasmania's famous Western Arthur Range, without the lakes, is not farfetched. But, you may say, there is a sealed road in the valley below running the entire length

achieving even that objective. Furthermore, there is no permanent water anywhere on the range!



It might come as a surprise that this discussion has omitted even one example from the traditional heartland of Victorian bushwalking—the alpine and subalpine north-east. As many of you can testify, that omission may do that wonderful region an injustice. You will no doubt have suggestions of your own. Happy scrub-bashing!



Blackening the Blue Mountains

What's left from the ravages of the bushfires, by *Sven Klinge*



The Glenbrook entrance to the Blue Mountains National Park. Klinge

SYDNEY BUSHWALKERS WILL HAVE TO FIND greener pastures for their outdoors pursuits this autumn as bushfires have ravaged New South Wales. From the first fires in the lower Blue Mountains on Christmas Eve 2001 until the last flames were subdued in mid-January 2002, about 600 000 hectares (equivalent to the size of Kosciuszko National Park) were burnt out by 100 separate fires.

Older bushwalkers will be familiar with the moonscapes left in the wake of flames as the fires come in regular cycles—usually every six–ten years. During the summers of 1945, 1958, 1969, 1977, 1979, 1982, 1987,

1994, and 1997 there were severe fires, some of which burnt more land area, destroyed more property and took more lives than the inferno of 2002.

The recent fires were particularly savage because of the changeable, gusty and dry winds which created havoc for fire-fighters as conditions were unpredictable and intense. The wildlife toll is incalculable and only wombats seem to have been able to escape. A lot of media attention was focused on the residential toll such as Cross Street, Warri-moo, in the Blue Mountains, where several houses were gutted. In all about 172 houses

were destroyed during the two-week period and property damage amounted to about \$70 million. The media also focused public attention on the 33 alleged arsonists who were charged in connection with the fires although many of the worst fires were caused by natural phenomena such as lightning strikes.

There is public debate about issues such as fire management and hazard-reduction policies, wilderness zones, the building of residential areas on the borders of National Parks, fire-fighting techniques and penalties for juvenile arsonists.

The bushwalking areas most affected by fire

1. Wollemi National Park

All access roads to the Colo River area from the Putty Road were closed during the fires and much of the area in central Wollemi is burnt out. Northern Wollemi, near Bulga, was also affected but the region is not as popular with bushwalkers. Western Wollemi remains unaffected including Newnes (the Wolgan valley), Glen Davis (Capertee River Gorge) and the canyoning belt of the Wollangambe region.

2. Lower Blue Mountains

The lower Grose River, Kurrajong, the Blue Labyrinth and the area to the south of the Great Western Highway as far up as Kings Tableland have all been damaged. The Glenbrook entrance remained closed until February when fallen trees and dangerous, burnt-out stumps were removed.

3. The Royal National Park

Fortunately this National Park wasn't completely destroyed as had been feared. Unlike in 1994, when more than 90 per cent of the park was burnt, 40 per cent of the park remains untouched this year. Ecologists are debating the effect of such frequent and intense burning. Audley, Bonnie Vale camping area, Watamolla and Garie Beach all survived and therefore the Coast Walk and Lady Carrington Drive are largely unaffected. The areas worst affected are in the

north and west of the park, around the Hacking River.

4. The Nattai National Park

Nattai was hit hard and walkers should avoid the area to the south of Lake Burragarang for quite a while.

5. The Morton National Park

Morton had a severe fire front in the Sassafras region. Visitors to the Budawang should phone the district office at Fitzroy Falls before undertaking any bushwalks.

6. The Deua National Park

The area near Moruya on the south coast was partly burnt by a moderate outbreak of fire and walkers should determine whether their intended route passes into this area by contacting the National Parks & Wildlife Service. Those heading for Bendethera should also contact authorities as parts of the park were still being mopped up at the time of writing.

7. Yengo National Park

This large wilderness park between Wisemans Ferry and the Putty Road was almost burnt out and will remain unattractive to walkers for some time to come.

8. The Australian Capital Territory

Some of the forests at Mt Stromlo around the northern Brindabellas, west of Canberra, have been destroyed.

NSW bushwalkers desperate to undertake some walks without venturing out of the State should try the Kanangra-Boyd, western Wollemi, upper Blue Mountains, Kosciuszko and Barrington Tops National Parks. Gradually there will again be more opportunities for bushwalking in the regions that have been damaged by fire and the burning will make previously scrubby areas such as Wollemi, Morton and the Deua National Parks more accessible options for off-track walkers.

Regrowth was already evident a few days after the first rains of the year in mid-January. As always, the Australian bush will

New growth begins only days after the fires have swept through. Klinge

recover. Indeed, low intensity fire kick-starts the growth cycle of many eucalypt species and allows new shoots, now freed of competing undergrowth, to rise quickly to the canopy. ☀

See page 49 for Sven Klinge's bio.



Travelling in the Direction of Fear

Jonathan Milner describes his flight from the path of a major bushfire in the Blue Mountains

ON A PUNGENT EVENING IN 1994 I WATCHED a distant menace. The brilliant orange inferno engulfed the horizon, coating us in a shower of ashes, soot and dust. For those in the inner city of Sydney, it was a wondrous sight. As the fire vaulted roads, incinerated houses and left in its wake shattered lives we marvelled at its awesome beauty. We had little idea of its ferocity and grotesque speed. Nor did we have any conception of the unparalleled horror of being thrust into its path.

Years later, as a tree exploded three metres to our right and a fire front encircled our battered old car, my naïve and distant memory of the 1994 bushfires came flooding back.

Our extraordinary day in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales, began with a familiar trend. We bounced along a series of unmarked dirt tracks in an attempt to find the point of departure for Breakfast Creek canyon. After some time we descended into what we hoped was the correct gully. Our optimism was well and truly misplaced; in the fierce midday heat we discovered an indistinct track and, following our compass bearings, strayed off the track. After two hours of grinding through the unyielding scrub, we decided to retrace our steps. The heat was intense—overwhelming even—and the strong, blustery wind swirling in the tree-tops only accentuated the stifling acidity of the terrain.

With our legs sporting a profusion of cuts and bruises and surrounded by a horde of flies, we climbed wearily into the car and began the long journey back to Bells Line of Road. We had been driving for only a short time when all four of us noticed a huge bank of storm clouds gathering on the horizon. They rose dramatically from the treetops and at their epicentre was a muted, red hue to which we were completely unaccustomed. We drove on, fascinated by the spectre of this unusual and rapidly maturing storm front. Then someone mentioned bushfires.

Adam slammed on the brakes. We all leaped from the car, eyes fixed on the solid tower of billowing smoke and began to sniff. Nothing. Yet despite the lack of scent, the penny had dropped. To our front and sides was undoubtedly a series of enormous bushfires. On impulse we continued towards the fires as the pillars of smoke, although huge, appeared to be some distance away. As we drove, we made plans for a getaway—we would reverse and head in the opposite direction. Not, to be sure, the most successful method for evading fire fronts but our stu-



'...the fire vaulted roads, incinerated houses and left in its wake shattered lives...'

pidity has to be seen in light of our ignorance. Never having experienced bushfires, how were we to know that they can travel at up to 70 kilometres an hour?

After a short time a large, red truck loomed. As it drew nearer we recognised the distinctive outline of the bushfire brigade. The rig stopped beside our car and a harrowed, battered-looking fire-fighter told us that we were encircled by a series of fronts. We were to retreat to the cricket oval at a nearby correctional facility and 'wait it out'. His laconic drawl only served to heighten our sense of foreboding.

On our arrival at the correctional facility in the heart of the Newnes State Forest, a bevy of fire-fighters informed us of the developments. Two of their colleagues had

died when a front had engulfed them and the same front was now preventing the volunteers from assisting in the battle to save the city of Lithgow. We were ensnared by a number of fronts which were moving swiftly towards the correctional facility. The fear was that these fronts would amalgamate and form an enormous, single front. A helicopter landed on the oval and refuelled; we were told to wait for further instructions.

Two hours passed. We had told our families to expect us back in Sydney by 8.30 pm. It was now 6.30 pm and we asked (somewhat sheepishly) if we might call someone. We were told to go next door and use the only phone on the site. The phone belonged to a resident of the facility who ran an adventure-tours company from his home. He graciously

allowed us to use his phone despite the fact that he was frantically getting ready to fight the fires. When we asked why he was not preparing to evacuate his home, his response was alarmingly simple: 'My entire business is in this house, I can't leave.' His statement made clear to us the enormity of the threat facing those who live in the bush. Shortly after we made our phone call the line went dead—the fire had downed the telephone lines.

We returned to the oval in time to hear that a southerly change was expected, which would speed up the onset of the fronts. We were expected to assist with the fire-fighting effort when the fire swept through the correctional facility. Our instructions were simple: get your car into the middle of the oval, cover yourselves with clothing and work the water pumps. We chuckled nervously as we slipped into our long pants and jumpers.



Burnt-out bush in the lower Blue Mountains. Klinge

At 10.30 pm there was a flurry of activity. The fire-fighters leaped into the waiting assembly of trucks and rumbled past our car, kicking up a cloud of dust as they churned along the dirt road. The last of the trucks stopped alongside us and we were told to follow:

'The two fronts have ebbed, we've heard there's a gap between them and we're going to make a run for it. Stay in the convoy and don't drop too far back.'

The fleet of trucks crunched into gear and thundered towards the fire. As we followed

in their wake, our hearts racing, we realised that we were way out of our depth.

We drove on in silence, the dust obscuring our vision. The dim, red hue appeared in the distance and grew clearer and larger as we drew closer. Without a moment's notice the redness gave way to a river of brilliantly discernible flames. Behind us, the blackness of the night remained undisturbed. At our front and sides a blanket of fiercely radiant flames devoured the landscape.

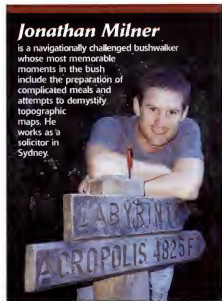
To our disbelief the convoy kept moving towards the fire. After a remarkably short time, we were about 30 or 40 metres from the front. On all sides the earth was alight in an awesome display of popping, crackling and exploding flame. And still we drew nearer.

Everything began to happen very quickly. There was a loud clunk on the roof. Nick wound down the window, poked his head out and saw a large, burning log on top of

was sprinting towards our car. 'Fucken back up mate, back up!' He roared over the din of the fire and the collapsing timber. We needed no second invitation. Adam threw the car into reverse and stepped on the accelerator. The vehicle darted backwards, weaving from side to side, the view obscured by the dirt-encrusted rear windscreen. We were yelling instructions at him, partly to assist with directions and, of equal importance, in a cathartic release of our pent-up anxiety.

The danger receded although we continued in reverse for some two kilometres until we met State forestry fire trucks. We waited for about an hour while the lone fire-fighter who had returned to guide us formed a plan. Finally, we were escorted from the forest by another road and from there through Lithgow.

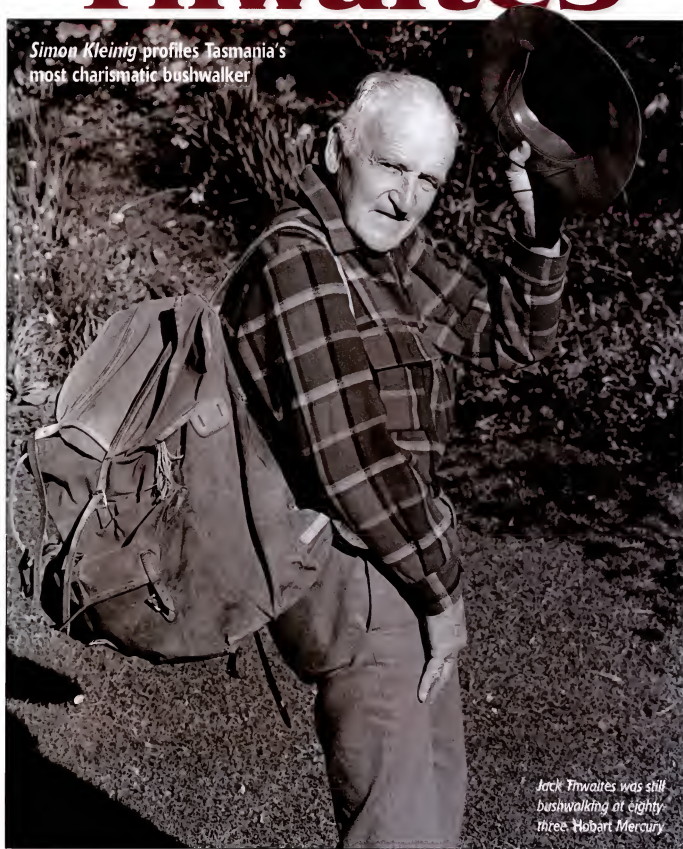
Our thanks seemed woefully inadequate as our escort turned his truck and returned to the inferno. Lithgow, the home of many of the fire-fighters doing battle in the Newnes State Forest, was still ablaze. Fire crept down the ridgelines towards houses, and the landscape on either side of the highway was charred beyond recognition. Worse still, two volunteers had lost their lives in an attempt to stem the unrelenting fronts. We had learned that the bush, in all its beauty, is possessed of a tremendous and indiscriminate power. Some of that power is manageable; much of it is not. But for the phenomenal courage and selfless dedication of a band of fire-fighters, we would have faced the onslaught alone. It is not a prospect I would relish. 📍



WILD MAN

Jack Thwaites

Simon Kleinig profiles Tasmania's most charismatic bushwalker



Jack Thwaites was still bushwalking at eighty-three Hobart Mercury

'THERE WILL BE A STRANGE EMPTINESS IN the Tasmanian bush in future', reported the *Hobart Mercury* on Tuesday, 6 May 1986. 'With the passing of Jack Thwaites, so ends an era of pioneering bushmen who believed Shanks' pony was preferable to the motor car and that Mother Nature bestowed her greatest gifts on us for free'.

Even bushwalkers need to know something of those upon whose shoulders they are standing. An examination of the ample shoulders of Jack Thwaites—bushwalker, historian, raconteur and lifelong servant to the Hobart Walking Club (HWC)—reveals a man whose appreciation of the bush and desire to introduce it to others are without parallel. Jack Thwaites left an enduring legacy of goodwill and community service that spanned

'The seven members huddled together for the next 46 hours while the little tent was buffeted by rain, wind, sleet and snow.'

the better part of the twentieth century. His considerable influence left a ripple effect on succeeding generations of bushwalkers, well beyond the borders of his home State. Thwaites was present at the beginning of the golden age of Tasmanian bushwalking when walkers pushed further into the largely unmapped and often unexplored parts of that State's wilderness. Active until the final weeks of his 84 years, Thwaites travelled to and walked in every corner of the State he loved so well.

From the perspective of the present it is easy to regard him as something of a monument—a figure larger than life—a notion Thwaites would have shunned. Like his northern counterpart and friend Fred Smithies, Thwaites never regarded himself as the foremost bushwalker of his generation; rather, he drew on his wide experience and used his knowledge of the bush to promote and introduce the wonders of the Tasmanian landscape to others, particularly to younger

people. He was well-suited for this task with a gentle, patient and courteous nature which in later years earned him the nickname, 'Gentleman Jack'. Tall and slim, with a keen sense of humour and occasional wry wit, he had a natural ability to put people at ease.



Born in Kendal in the UK's Lake District in 1902, John Barrass Thwaites migrated to

believes that this was her father's most memorable walking adventure. The spectacular mountain and forest scenery made the Linda Track one of the finest walks in Australia at that time. The trip made a big impression on 24-year-old Thwaites; two years later he and a companion fought their way through a largely trackless wilderness—now known as the South Coast Track.



The fellow in the bow is taking it very seriously; Thwaites is at the oars, Port Davey, 1960. David Wilson

Hobart with his family at the age of eleven. Like many residents of Hobart, the young Thwaites found the slopes of Mt Wellington irresistible and the mountain soon became a frequent destination. During his life he was to acquire a thorough and intimate knowledge of Mt Wellington and its history. It was the panorama of mountains visible from the summit of Mt Wellington, distant peaks marching away into the hazy Southwest, that first ignited Thwaites's interest in bushwalking. He began his working life as an apprentice at the Government Printing Office and spent his recreation time on increasingly adventurous bushwalking forays.

At the end of 1926 Thwaites undertook a journey to the west coast along the old Linda Track—in the days before Queens-town was linked to the rest of the State by the Lyell Highway. His daughter Anne be-

To put these journeys into perspective, it should be remembered that it would be three years before local bushman and fur trapper Bert Nicholls cut the Overland Track, Fred Smithies had yet to reach Frenchmans Cap, and the lure of Federation Peak and the bulk of South-west Tasmanian track making was still 20 years away. Thwaites was later to play an important role in the opening of all these regions.

In 1929 Evelyn Emmett and Jack Thwaites founded the HWC. During the formative years Thwaites was very much the linchpin of the club, contributing a good deal of enthusiasm, drive and energy to the club's activities. He virtually ran the walking programme single-handed—if there was a walk planned, it was assumed that Thwaites would lead it. He was club secretary for the first nine years, president or vice-president for the

next nine, and held practically every position within the club at various times. In 1950 Thwaites was made an honorary life member in recognition of his service to the club.

The HWC's first extended walk was during Easter 1930, and the Linda Track was chosen as a final opportunity to walk to Queenstown—the completion of the highway was only two years away—thereby marking the end of an era in Tasmanian history. Nine months later Thwaites joined Emmett on a landmark walk from Cradle Valley to Lake St Clair, one of the first Overland Track journeys. Emmett, first director of the Tasmanian Tourist Bureau, had organised a party of nine for the first of a series of annual walks through the Reserve, as it was known in those days, under the guidance of Bert Nicholls.

Thwaites was taken with the spectacular scenery of the Reserve and returned at the end of 1931 with another party to explore the mountains overlooking Lake St Clair. In a busy week they climbed Mt Olympus and Mt Byron from Byron Gap and spent the night at Nicholls Hut (now Nicholls Junction). The next morning they walked to Lake Marion and set up camp beside the lake before ascending the lofty heights of the Guardians. The following day they made the first ascent of Mt Manfred, then the party moved on to Mt Gould. An energetic week was capped with a scramble to the airy summit of Mt Ida, the second recorded ascent.

In early 1934 Thwaites made the first of several pioneering trips to Frenchmans Cap. Photographs from this trip show the party curiously dressed in old suits and jackets, standard bush attire in the days well before fibrepile and Gore-tex jackets. (See the Frenchmans Cap feature in *Wild* no 77.) Des Giblin and Emmett joined him and it was on this trip that Thwaites named Lake Sophie after Emmett's wife.

In April 1935 Thwaites married Cecilie Cripps whom he had met through the HWC. Nine months later Thwaites returned to Frenchmans Cap with Cecilie, Rhona Warren, Leo Luckman and Jock Turner. The party put cairns on the first-ascent route to the summit of Frenchmans Cap. Later, they made the first visit to and named Jetty Lake on their way out over the Raglan Range—they were only the second party to use this exit route. Thwaites returned with a HWC work party during six wet days in December 1944 to clear the track, which had fallen into disuse during the war years. 'We stood round our campfire (at Lake Tahune) in an absolute quagmire', Thwaites wrote to Smithies. There are a few straight-barrelled pines round the lake which would be quite suitable for the purpose...If a small hut were erected...it would serve our needs for the next dozen or so

years...' Thwaites later wrote to the Scenery Preservation Board (SPB), the forerunner of the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service, and some time later the first hut was built at Lake Tahune. In 1962 Thwaites supervised the building of the original hut at Lake Vera, this time in his capacity as secretary of the SPB.

In 1946 he was appointed administrative officer of the State Government photographic laboratory and film unit. In December 1948 Thwaites led an attempt on Fed-

eration Peak. The seven members huddled together for the next 46 hours while the little tent was buffeted by rain, wind, sleet and snow. Thwaites later described the situation as the most desperate he had experienced in a lifetime of bushwalking.

In December 1953 Thwaites was part of a HWC party which decided to retrace the route of Sir John and Lady Franklin's 1842 journey from Lake St Clair to Macquarie Harbour as part of the celebrations of the

foundation of the colony of Tasmania. Leo and Jessie Luckman were also members of the party: 'As I was president at the time it was taken for granted that I would take the part of Lady Jane Franklin', Jessie later explained. However, 'no gallant males offered to transport me in a chair as Lady Jane had been for part of her trip'. The track cut in 1842 was quickly obliterated by regrowth so the HWC party's route could only approximate the original one. It was a rugged undertaking and Thwaites later wrote a detailed account of the trip for the magazine *Walhabout*.

In 1958 Thwaites led another attempt on Federation Peak with Paddy Pallin, Jock Turner and Vic Batchler, all of whom were aged about 60 at the time. However,



Three 'names' of Tasmanian bushwalking pioneering: from left, Leo Luckman, Jock Turner and Jack Thwaites on the west coast road in 1936. Thwaites collection



Thwaites (left) and Evelyn Emmett on the summit of Frenchmans Cap in 1934. Thwaites collection

eration Peak. 'That accounts for the name Thwaites Plateau on the ridge below Four Peaks where our party was weatherbound', he later wrote—a classic understatement. Thwaites's party might well have made the first ascent of Federation Peak had the attempt not been thwarted by atrocious weather. The party made a storm-swept camp in the lee of a ridge on Thwaites Plateau, desperately holding down their tents as the storm raged over them. Finally, on 5 January, with a summit attempt out of the question and the temperature down to 7°C, the party began the return journey. By the time they reached the Gables—wet, shivering and showing signs of hypothermia—they decided that it

bad weather frustrated the attempt and Thwaites was again denied success on the elusive spire.

Thwaites was for many years a member of the Cradle Mountain—Lake St Clair National Park Board and the Mt Field National Park Board. In 1958 he was appointed Inspector of Reserves for the SPB. He was

promoted to Superintendent of Reserves three years later, a position he held until his retirement in 1967.

Thwaites's service to the wider community is as impressive as his service to bushwalking. He gave many years of voluntary service to the National Fitness Council and, as president and vice-president, helped to pioneer the Youth Hostels Association of Tasmania. In later years he was awarded honorary life membership. The Jack Thwaites Memorial Hostel commemorates his significant contribution and a showcase at the hostel displays his weathered rucksack and bush hat. Thwaites was of the opinion that many of the issues and problems confronting youth could be solved if young people

fourth time in 43 years, he stood on the shattered quartzite summit.



Thwaites was a member of the Royal Society of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Historical Research Association and presented several papers to both organisations. He was also a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. In 1977 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in recognition of his long and diverse contribution to the community.

Thwaites cultivated a lifelong interest in the history of the places he visited. His friends fondly remember his camp-fire reminiscences and anecdotes. Thwaites's fireside yarns were legendary, drawing on a seemingly inexhaustible fund of tales on almost any subject—

around the State that HWC members were given the opportunity to visit areas that would otherwise have been denied them. Thwaites took a genuine interest in the history of many of these families, carried out considerable research and provided them with the results of his findings.

In his retirement years Thwaites often accompanied HWC friend Lindsay Whitham on his historical research trips to the west coast, frequently punctuated with intervals to 'boil the billy'. He wrote numerous articles for several publications although those published in the HWC's biennial publication *The Tasmanian Tramp* perhaps best reflect his enormous contribution and wide-ranging subject matters. These now represent an invaluable archive not only to the HWC but also to the wider community. Thwaites was a keen photographer and his pictures, particularly those taken during the 1920s and 1930s, form one of the finest records of bushwalking during that period. His photographic collection is held jointly by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the HWC.

Thwaites continued in retirement to provide ongoing field assistance to many of the National Parks across the State. The restoration of the historic Steppes homestead was a favourite project and, together with



Thwaites near Mt Wellington, 1968. Bob Wyatt collection

were introduced to the bush. 'I think a busy person is a happy person and today's kids are bored', Thwaites once said. 'They need to be shown the splendour of nature and given the chance to experience the feeling of achievement when you reach the top of a mountain and look down on a spectacular view.'

convicts, bushrangers, Aborigines and settlers—no matter where he was camped, Thwaites could relate an accompanying story. HWC member Sheila Reynolds captured the mood:

Oh Gentleman Jack's a modest man,
Of modest means it seems,
Yet he always boasts a good bush yarn

'Thwaites was present at the beginning of the golden age of Tasmanian bushwalking'

In early 1977 Thwaites returned to complete some unfinished business at Federation Peak. During eight days of fine weather his persistence and determination in the past were rewarded when he and 19-year-old Adrian Goodwin climbed to the summit. Thwaites was then seventy-five. Two months later, buoyed by his recent success on Federation Peak, he revisited Frenchmans Cap and in good weather scrambled once more to the stone cairn which then marked the top of the mountain. For the

To enhance your nightly dreams.
And when your strength is flagging,
So tired you can hardly see,
The voice of Jack sounds loud and clear,
'Now who's for some billy tea?'

One feature of Thwaites's personality that set him apart from other bushwalkers was the ease with which he established relationships with other people who in turn took him into their confidence. He established such a good rapport with various landowners



Simon Kleinig

A resident of Adelaide, Simon seeks the freedom of the slopes of the Mt Lofty and Flinders Ranges whenever possible. He heads for wilderness Tasmania during hot South Australian summers.

other volunteers, he devoted considerable time to the enterprise. A memorial to his contribution is displayed at the homestead.

At the age of 83, Thwaites's passion for the bush remained undiminished. 'I enjoy everything about bushwalking and have had some terrific walks', he enthused to a newspaper reporter at the time. 'Somebody's only got to ask me to go for a walk and I'll be off like a shot. Bushwalking is terrific; it keeps you fit and active. And you can have such adventures!' In later years he continued to lead regular excursions into the bush, mainly on day-trips, the last only a month before his death. In the last six months of his life, perhaps with a sense of his own mortality, Thwaites wrote to John Wythes and closed his letter with the words, 'Take care of the bush, John'. With this symbolic gesture, Thwaites entrusted the future of his beloved Tasmanian bush to succeeding generations of bushwalkers. ●

Thanks to the Hobart Walking Club: *The Tasmanian Tramp*; Archives Office of Tasmania; Hobart Mercury; Jack Thwaites, by G Willis-Johnson, *Walk*, 1980; John Cannon.

TREKKING NEPAL

In the Shadow of Everest

Michael Robinson keeps himself warm on a tea-house trek in the Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal. Photos by the author



Sagarmatha (Mt Everest) from Kala Pattar.

MY FELLOW PASSENGER HOGS THE VIEW from the window of the Twin Otter aircraft. His obsession with the instrumentation in the cockpit dissipates as we spy an airstrip carved high into the Himalayan terrain. The looming runway slopes uphill, the plane is nosediving towards it but the angles don't seem to match up. A crash-landing appears imminent as the plane hurtles downwards. At the last moment the pilot pulls up the nose, creating a down draught that slows the plane. We land and the motors are thrown into a howling, full-throttle reverse thrust.

Cecile and I file out of the 18-seater aircraft on to the gravel airstrip in the clear, crisp air of 2800 metres. This is Lukla in the Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal and the starting-point for our Mt Everest trek. It's a relief to have left behind the smog and the snarling traffic of Kathmandu and to arrive at this sleepy town where a brace of mountains surrounds us.

'A crash-landing appears imminent as the plane hurtles downwards. At the last moment the pilot pulls up the nose, creating a down draught that slows the plane.'

A few porters approach us half-heartedly. We wish to be independent and politely refuse them. When I lift my 15 kilogram pack I begin to rue our decision. Compounding my regret is my fragile health; I'm still recovering from the curse of Kathmandu and I have also succumbed to a cold. Cecile soldiers on, enraptured with the scenery and the euphoria of the mountains.

Our first night is spent in the village of Phakding. From our lodge dining-room we can see and hear the roaring Dudh Kosi river. We climb steep stairs to our poky, plywood-walled room. Shivering, we change into our sleeping attire and zip ourselves into our new sleeping bags.

The next day is fine and warm and mountain scenery is around virtually every bend in the track. We criss-cross the Dudh Kosi on impressive steel swing bridges, a far cry from the log-and-stone affairs I had negotiated in 1986. The ascent to Namche Bazaar is much steeper and longer than I had remembered. We stop frequently to cope with the effects of exhaustion and altitude. Trekkers going the other way don't make it

any easier with their relentlessly upbeat comments: 'only half an hour now' when I am counting on it being five minutes.

Eventually we stagger into town past a German bakery, a pizzeria advertising Internet access and innumerable stalls selling tourist kitsch. Trekkers in brightly coloured down jackets, sporting enormous packs and trekking poles strike an almost alien chord.

An embroidered curtain hangs over the low-set door-frame of the famous Khumbu

Namche is remarkable for the fact that it follows a contour and remains nearly level all the way to Kyangjuma. From within a tea house comes the unmistakable low chanting of Tibetan Buddhist monks.

The turn off to the Gokyo valley marks the start of a steep ascent, initially on a slate staircase that falls precariously away on one side. The imposing monastery below us at Tengpoche is perched above the confluence of the Dudh Kosi and Imja Khola rivers.



A Tibetan trader at the Namche Bazaar Saturday market.

Lodge; it catches on my pack as I bend to enter. The lodge has an amazing dining-room with views of the natural amphitheatre that cradles the town. The south-facing room catches the sun and is a toasty haven from the winter chill.

Tibetan traders have mustered their yaks in a low field. Outside their tents are garish Chinese blankets and clothes. The wealthier Sherpas desultorily inspect the wares while trekkers look for photo opportunities. The Tibetans' skittish yaks are regularly herded through the narrow, cobble-stoned lanes of town. The bells hanging from shaggy necks herald their approach and it's prudent to duck out of their way to avoid being knocked over.

After a day of acclimatising to the altitude (3446 metres) we head off to the Gokyo valley. The main track up the valley beyond

Every now and again a helicopter sweeps up the valley. Ama Dablam (6854 metres) is a sentinel over the alpine grandeur.

We can just see the rooftop of the lodge at Phortse Tenga, a steep 300 metres below us on the other side of the ridge. It's good to be heading down and it only takes a short while before we arrive at a basic lodge crammed full of trekkers. A taciturn New Yorker is reading *War and Peace* by the light of his fading headtorch. A Frenchman regales us with stories of the French Alps; he and his Swedish companion are heading up to Gokyo in one day—thumbing their noses at the recommended three days.

Next morning the lodge owner feeds her yak-cow cross (a *dzopkyo*) from a large, plastic water-container. A crow perches on the cut-out edge attempting to nuzzle in. It is only a two-hour walk to Dole, our destination for

the day. On a walk up the snow-flecked valley behind the small village in the afternoon, we scan the mountains for snow leopards and yeti but don't see any. We see large pheasants called Tibetan snow cocks that meld into the rocky terrain. They are of jittery disposition and make a high-pitched alarm call as they splay their tail feathers, revealing a shock of plumage.

The walk to Machhermo the following day is in light snow. A pair of golden eagles circle effortlessly above. That night the snow begins to flurry and when we wake up it is still falling. It eases at mid-morning, the clouds clear and the sun breaks through. We decide to press on but are surprised at the number of trekkers we meet on the track who have been spooked and are returning. They are probably acting on the advice of Sherpas, who aren't fond of walking through snow in their sand-shoes. It's not deep but it is slippery; on a steep descent at Pangka we skate down a treacherously icy track. It was here that an avalanche killed 40 trekkers in 1995.

We come to a series of small lakes, a Himalayan dipper searches for food in the snow-melt stream at the head of the second lake. The snow is deeper but we trudge through occasional thigh-deep drifts using the tracks already made by others. On the shores of the larger third lake is the village of Gokyo.

The 'Gokyo Resort' has state-of-the-art facilities: plywood walls so that conversations in the next room

keep you awake; a swinging door that slams every time someone goes through it; pine floors that amplify the stomping of boots; no electricity, water or gas; no insulation—our water-bottles freeze overnight; and a wooden, hole-in-the-floor toilet that has more misses than hits. However, the resort does offer these supreme luxuries: a large, warm dining room with good food and company; a 'sun room' constructed of windows that get your damp socks steaming. A row of plastic chairs face the lake and are conveniently situated outside the supply shop. It's a favourite spot for altitude-addled trekkers to slump, zombie-like, soaking up the sun's

in the dark. The puny light makes it a precarious descent. At the bottom we cross an icy stream on stepping stones. Our return to the dining-room is met by a chorus of congratulations. Returning mountaineers, conquering heroes, we shrug off the admiration with modesty, describing the arduous climb as a doddle. Thawing out around the heater and ordering garlic soup and a rich pasta are suitable rewards.

The next morning I am feeling the effects of altitude; I have a headache and no appetite, so I take it easy. In the afternoon, I am feeling stronger and we decide to visit the fourth lake by walking through snow and ice



Mt Everest region, Nepal



Chorten with Ama Dablam (left) and Mong (right) in the background. Tengpoche is hidden from view.

feeble rays. Below lies the jade-coloured Gokyo Lake surrounded by snow, sparkling in the sunshine. The edges are just beginning to freeze over.

Across the lake is Gokyo Ri, the 5350 metre 'hill'—the end-point for most trekkers. Training the binoculars on its steep flank reveals several groups of trekkers slowly zigzagging their way to the top. There's no single track but some eroded paths eventually lead to a rocky summit, bedecked with prayer flags and cairns.

Our summit party departs late in the day, after 3 pm, to see the sun set over Mt Everest. The higher we go the more often we have to pause. Only the tips of the highest peaks are lit as we stagger to the top. The light fades quickly and twilight bathes the Sagarmatha (Mt Everest), Lhotse, Nuptse massif in a surreal indigo wash. The thermometer on someone's watch registers -5°C. Donning trusty head-torches, about eight of us begin the return journey, wending our way down

skirting one side of the Ngozumpa Glacier. We brave a freezing wind for much better views of Cho Oyu and of the aptly named Fangs on the Tibetan border.

The recent snow has thwarted our planned attempt to cross the Cho La. We don't have crampons or an ice-axe and feel that the steep scramble over snow and ice may be too risky. Instead we head back down the Gokyo valley and cross the Dudh Kosi high up on a small bridge draped with icicles. We reach the opposite side of the valley and spend a long day descending to Phortse.

The following day the track hugs the left side of the Imja Khola valley. In places it drops away hundreds of metres. The views are relentlessly awesome. Ama Dablam continues to fill the horizon at every turn. We pass through the large village of Pangboche and its high, stone buildings. Children return from school, women wash clothes in the river, men are busily engaged in conversation and porters rest beside their inordinately heavy loads and sip chai. Unfortunately, we have to press on and eventually reach Phiche, cold, grey and bleak in the twilight.

A steep climb the next day levels off on a sheltered plateau dotted with cairns—the slate memorials to those who have died in the mountains. It is a sublimely melancholy location.

The lodge at Lobuje isn't great. Arriving in the late afternoon, we miss out on the recommended (warm) lodge. We content ourselves with the freezing one, packed with other late arrivals, all huddled around the heater. The heater requires frequent refuelling—a bucket load of yak dung is dumped into a heating chamber, liberally doused with kerosene and lit with a match. Great clouds of yak-dung smoke billow out of the cracked iron stove and leaky flue. A distinctive, sickly sweet smell fills the room accompanied by coughing and furious fanning of the air.

Escaping the horror I go outside to photograph the sunset on Nuptse. Exquisite mauves and pinks accentuate the snow and ice on its massive flank. Wispy clouds hugging its face look like candy floss.

A Canadian couple sharing our table admit to a shocking addition. Susan needs to drink Coke—that's all she'll drink. She holds a Coke as a chain-smoker clutches a cigarette. She smiles, revealing a mouthful of braces, no doubt keeping her sugar-addled teeth in place. Astonishingly, they've hired a porter, not to carry their packs or guide them, but to carry a couple of cartons of Coke up from Namche! The symbolism of this revelation—of Western decadence—is lost on them.

The lodge owner and porters eat last. The owner is a religious man; after his meal he recites mantras and reads his scriptures, fingering his prayer beads. When he has finished he dons a cap emblazoned with the word 'Boss'. Out come the dinner invoices and a calculator and trekkers pay for their food and board.

Reluctantly everyone shuffles off to bed. We climb into the top bunk of the dormitory; about ten people are on each of the two levels. Coughing, nose blowing, tossing and turning, fighting for air at 4900 metres, people try to sleep. The furtive whispering of a trekker to his companion sets me on edge. 'I'm so f—ing cold, I can't sleep', he whinges. A poor sleeping-bag at this altitude is potentially life threatening.

Long before dawn people are getting up and packing for the ascent of Kala Pattar. Amidst the clatter of trekking poles and the stomp of boots we get up for the usual sweet, milky coffee and porridge. Altitude, lack of sleep and bone-chilling cold cause us to snap at each other as we stumble along the shadowed valley. Cecile is almost in tears with a breathing problem. She is adamant that it is not acute mountain sick-

ness (AMS) but an allergic reaction to sleeping in that squalid dorm. We eventually stop once we've found the sun. We list the retinue of AMS tests: is she able to walk in a straight line? Does she have a splitting headache? Is she able to recall the prime minister's name? We agree she should have half a Diamox. Diamox can alleviate a throbbing, altitude-induced headache very quickly.

A steep ascent brings us to the Changri Shar glacial moraine. Large glacier polished

falling by the time we see the almost inviting yak-dung smoke billowing from our lodge.

The weather takes a turn for the worse as we head down the following day. No sooner have we stopped for lunch than a bitterly cold wind picks up and it becomes overcast. Out come the down jackets, gloves and beanies—it is the first time we have walked in them. We cross a swing-bridge high over the raging Imja Khola.

We enter a forest on the track up to Tengpoche. Gnarled rhododendrons and junipers are offset by silver birch, their shiny trunks occasionally encrusted with lichen. The view from Tengpoche is magical when it is fine. It is completely misted over early the next morning. A light frost covers the ground and an ethereal, cobalt-blue glow drifts between the imposing peaks of Thamserku and Kantega.

Descending on the other side is depressing. I have fond memories of abundant bird life and glorious forests. The trees are showing the signs of environmental degradation. Branches and whole limbs have been hacked off for fuel and the track is wider and has suffered from a multitude of eroded short cuts. Litter from the monastery is strewn throughout the forest. We don't hear or see a single bird. These bad vibes are not characteristic of the track as a whole, they seem to be more apparent in this formerly pristine area.

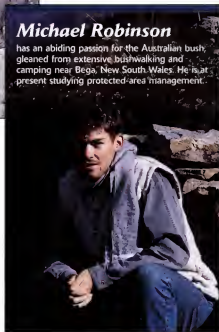
As we approach Namche a Himalayan tahr crosses the track only



Crossing the Dudh Kosi River near Na on the way down to Phortse.

rocks and stones slip beneath our feet. Surrounding us as we look down upon the few lodges of Gorak Shep is an outstanding array of mountains. After a leisurely lunch we almost reluctantly hit the track for our final ascent—the summit of Kala Pattar (5545 metres). Eventually we reach our destination, an exposed rock platform festooned with wind-whipped prayer flags. The summit slopes fall away hundreds of metres to a murky, snow-melt lake and the scope of a panoramic camera fails to do the scene justice. Only another 3000 metres up and we'd be on the summit of Sagarmatha. We decide to skip it. To the west, clouds are rushing up the Khumbu Glacier valley.

We race back to Lobuje; the entrancing sunset colours dance over Nuptse, darkness is



Michael Robinson

has an abiding passion for the Australian bush, gleaned from extensive bushwalking and camping near Bega, New South Wales. He is at present studying protected-area management.

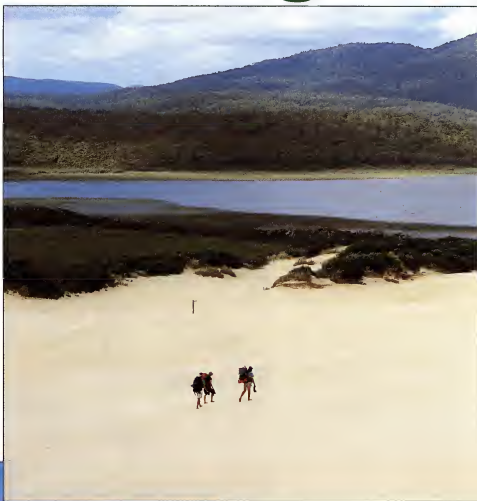
a few metres in front of me. These impressively antlered mountain goats are relatively tame within the confines of the Sagarmatha National Park. We reward ourselves at Namche with 'yak sizzlers'—buffalo steaks served very hot. Ahead lie only another two days retracing our steps to Lukla airport. ■

Walking the

**Nadgee Nature Reserve
and the Cape Howe region,
by Greg Caire.
Photos by the author**

BEING AN ISLAND CONTINENT, AUSTRALIA is blessed with thousands of kilometres of magnificent coastline. In Victoria and New South Wales, much of this narrow margin of sand, surf and scrub has been modified and overdeveloped. Regions further afield are generally considered to be less sullied and to have more wilderness value. The south-west coast of Tasmania, Cape Tribulation in Queensland and the wild, rocky shores of the Kimberley in Western Australia are undeniably rugged and beautiful; however, pristine and relatively remote walking locations are within a day's drive of both Sydney and Melbourne. The Cape Howe Wilderness Area—part of Croajingolong National Park in Victoria—and the adjoining Nadgee Nature Reserve in NSW together are such a region.

During a particularly dry summer, we set out from Mallacoota (in Victoria) with a party of six in the heat of January. With us were three Dutchmen, fresh from a northern winter, eagerly anticipating their first Australian bush-walking experience. After a two-hour car shuttle we waded into the estuary of Malla-



*Walkers approach Lake Barracoota through the dunes, Cape Howe Wilderness Area, Victoria. **Right**, collecting fresh water from Bunyip Hole, Nadgee Nature Reserve, New South Wales.*



The view from the summit of Howe Hill, looking across to Gabo Island (just off the coast of the Cape Howe Wilderness Area).

coota Inlet and were on our way. We crossed the mouth of the inlet with a canoe lent by some campers, which kept our packs out of the chest-deep water in the channel. The sandy shore on the other side of the narrow inlet marks the start of Croajingolong National Park's northern extension. Walking along the beach for about five kilometres, we entered the Cape Howe Wilderness Area. The magnificent wild beaches, tannin-stained coastal lakes and dune fields stretch to the Victoria-NSW border, and becomes the Nadgee Nature Reserve in NSW shortly before reaching Cape Howe.

As it was late afternoon, we headed into the dune fields around Lake Barracoota and camped on its reedy shore. The following morning we were up early to beat the heat of the day and walked the roughly 14 kilo-

Wilderness Coast



metres of beach to Lake Wau Wauka. The day dawned sunny and clear; only a gentle breeze was blowing as we passed Gabo Island, which is just off the shore. A few decades ago it was possible to walk across the narrow sand spit that joins Gabo to the mainland at low tide. Now the sea oozes over the isthmus on a more permanent basis.

highest point, for the reputedly spectacular views back to Mallacoota and across to Gabo Island. As it's quite a long walk to the summit of Howe Hill, we rose early but could only muster a party of four for the ascent. There is no real track to the top of the hill and, while the route up a long rising spur appears straightforward, the incredibly dense and spiky scrub

“Navigation” entailed squeezing through the green wall of tangled branches wherever it was possible, sometimes throwing your full body weight to make sufficient impact.’

The tannin-stained waters of Lake Wau Wauka are at the edges of the beach and a walk around the foreshore reveals a camp-site tucked away among the melaleuca and banksia trees. We were treated to a play of soft amber light on the dunes which lie north of the camp-site and extend, like a scene from *Lawrence of Arabia*, all the way to Cape Howe.

The next morning we planned to make our way to the top of Howe Hill, the area's

makes navigation a bit of a chore. After launching headlong into the tangled mass of vegetation we eventually broke through to the relatively open woodland of the ridge and made our way to the summit.

The views from the top are as spectacular as we had been led to believe and after a quick lunch we dived back into the bush. 'Navigation' entailed squeezing through the green wall of tangled branches wherever it



was possible, sometimes throwing your full body weight to make sufficient impact. It had been a long time since a bushfire had been through the area. Scratched and sweating profusely, we emerged on to the dunes seven hours later feeling that it was remarkable that we had exited only 20 metres from where we had plunged in at the start of the day. Back at Lake Wau Wauka, Michael Hampton and Pieter Diesveld were keen to move on to the next camp-site, so we wearily shouldered packs and headed for a point just beyond Cape Howe. The wind had picked up and we were sandblasted by a stiff offshore gale as soon as we left the lake-side camp-site. The temperature dropped and the traverse felt more like a sandstorm in the deserts of central Asia than a quiet stroll along an Australian beach. This region has a wild, remote feel and the only real intrusion is the concrete pillar that marks the border between Victoria and NSW. It is immedi-

deep channel within seconds and begun to carry him to New Zealand. After a few frantic moments he was able to scramble on to a sand bar and wade back to the shore, startled at the power of the ocean.

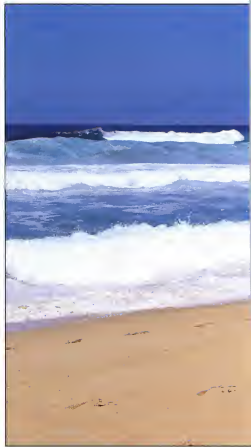
Next morning we were up early and, after stocking up on fresh water at Bunyip Hole (a reliable spring that nestles between sand-hills behind the beach), we headed north. At Howe Bay is the beginning of a long line of cliffs which run in a broken line up the coast so it is necessary to move slightly inland and tackle the spiky heath. The track is overgrown and not very distinct; it requires some navigation as it winds its way north, descending eventually to the shores of beautiful Nadgee Lake. On the narrow strip of sand between the sea and the lake hundreds of swans huddled in what looked like a mass sit-in. Closer to the sea was a huddle of gulls. We swam and lunched on the shores of the lake, then walked on over disused

and have sandy floors. If you pay a visit to the caves, it is necessary to leave in plenty of time to avoid being trapped by the incoming tide.

Returning to the beach, we picked up the tracks leading to the Merrica River ranger station and completed the road-bash to our vehicles before returning to Mallacoota.



Sharyn George walks across the Lawrence of Arabia dune landscape near Cape Howe, at the border of Victoria and NSW.



Michael Hampton and Sharyn George walk up the beach towards Lake Wau Wauka, the Cape Howe Wilderness Area.

ately south of Cape Howe proper and is the gateway to Nadgee Nature Reserve.

Crossing Cape Howe the wind increased in ferocity and blasted white caps off the swell into the little beach at Howe Bay. This wonderful spot, sometimes referred to as 'Bunyip Beach' or 'Howe Beach', has the feel of a remote smuggler's cove. Bands of cliff are to the north, wandering sand-dunes to the south and a remote State border is nearby. We nearly lost one of our Dutch companions to the wild seas here. We'd just set up camp behind the dunes (out of the wind) and were contemplating preparing the evening meal when cries from the beach alerted us to an unfolding drama. One of the Dutchmen had plunged into the surf, oblivious to a nasty rip just off the beach. He was dragged out through the breakers with an astonished look on his face as the water had been only waist-deep. However, the undercurrent had pulled him into a

and overgrown four-wheel-drive tracks to the inlet formed by the north and south arms of Little Creek. The headwaters of this small creek system represent one of a very few relatively undisturbed catchments on the coast of NSW. Our final night was spent at the camp-site north of Little Creek inlet.

Day five dawned bright and clear and the relentless wind of the past couple of days had dropped. The track continues through ever thicker stands of forest on old four-wheel-drive tracks up a long hill and descends to Newtons Beach. This magnificent bay was farmed by Will Palmer and Wally Newton from 1890 and bits of machinery and farm buildings can still be seen though they are rapidly being consumed by the bush. Just north of Newtons Beach, around a rocky headland, lies a honeycomb of deep sea caves, accessible only at low tide. The caverns extend into the base of the cliffs, gouged by the relentless action of the sea,

It's possible to complete this walk comfortably in three days but five days give plenty of time to soak up the rugged beauty and explore the nooks and crannies. Many walkers complete a continuous, long-distance haul from Eden in the north around the coast to Thurra River in Victoria in ten to 14 days.

The NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service and Parks Victoria have allowed this beautiful region to revert to its wilderness state. This means that a lot of previously open four-wheel-drive tracks have been closed and the walking tracks will be left to assimilate to the bush. The effects of this policy are already evident—some sections of the heath walk along the coast north of Cape Howe are overgrown. It adds to the flavour of the walk but navigation and route finding are up to walkers.

Getting there

Drive to Mallacoota in the far east of Gippsland, Victoria; Mallacoota is 500 kilometres

from Melbourne and is roughly the same distance from Sydney on the Princes Highway.

It is necessary to do a car shuttle to the ranger station at Merrica River in Nadgee Nature Reserve, NSW; leave a vehicle and return to Mallacoota to start the walk (allow approximately two-and-a-half hours for the shuttle).

out for the fresh-water springs which often flow out of the base of sand-dunes into the sea. These are particularly common on the rock shelves around Cape Howe.

Maps

Maps of the area include the excellent sketch-map of the Croajingolong National

Cape Howe Wilderness and Nadgee Nature Reserve



Greg Caire

Starting as a wide-eyed schoolboy in the Blue Mountains near Sydney, for two decades Greg has been climbing, cross-country skiing, cycling and sea kayaking in various parts of the world. The happiness and warmth of poor, rural peoples around the globe including Tibetan nomads and Brazilian peasants are a constant source of inspiration.



Park including the Sandpatch and Cape Howe Wilderness Areas, by Stuart Brookes (1996). For the Nadgee Nature Reserve, the Central Mapping Authority's 1:25 000 Nadgee and Narrabarba sheets are sufficient.

The entire route is covered (with minimal detail) on the 1:100 000 Natmap Eden sheet.

Books

An excellent resource, which includes extensions to Lakes Entrance in Victoria, is *Walking the Wilderness Coast* by Peter Cook and Chris Dowd. For the Nadgee section, also seek out the *NPA Guide to National Parks of Southern NSW* by Peter Wright. 📖

Water

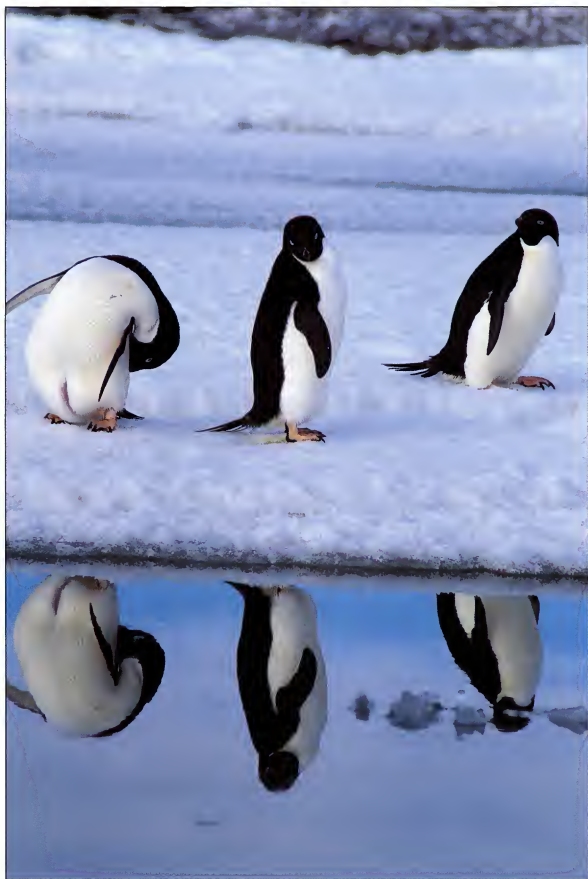
Fresh water can be scarce after a protracted, dry summer—coastal lakes are affected by salt and creeks stop running. Check on the water situation with the ranger station at Mallacoota before starting, and keep an eye

Promenade

Eric Philips chills out with the locals



Six-weeks-old emperor chicks with fully grown adults, Auster Rookery.



Adelie penguins reflected in an open lead of water off Béchervaise Island.



Emperor penguins dwarfed by ice-cliffs, Auster Rookery.



A king penguin struts its stuff, Heard Island, sub-Antarctica.

Eric Philips lives in Melbourne where he operates his own adventure company. He has led lightweight and self-supported ski expeditions across Greenland, and Canada's Ellesmere Island, and worked as a field training officer with the Australian Antarctic Division at Mawson Station.



THE GREATER BLUE MOUNTAINS

YENGO NATIONAL PARK, LIKE ALL PARKS near Sydney, is dominated by sandstone. It is as wild as its larger and more famous neighbours, Wollemi and the Blue Mountains, but Yengo is north of the Hawkesbury River and east of the Putty Road. Most of Yengo's creeks and streams drain into the Macdonald River, which carves a sandy bed through a 140 000 hectare maze of featureless eucalypt-clad hills.

waterfalls, lookouts, swimming-holes, caves, rock formations or significant archaeological remains: not even walking tracks or facilities. Informal visitors' books at trigonometry points take decades to fill. Nevertheless, Yengo has a certain mystique about it—it is little known and rarely explored. Mapping of the area is poor with inaccurate 20 metre contour lines. Many of the fire tracks are overgrown and turn-offs are not signposted. The sole guide-

A Highway of

**Tracking the Macdonald River, by Sven Klinge and Anthony Dunk.
Photos by Sven Klinge**

'...the leaf litter underneath Sven's feet gave way and he tumbled down the slope, over the edge and crashed down on to the next ledge, centimetres from a potentially fatal fall.'



Although the walking was easy and we could have exited the National Park on the second day, we decided to camp below a prominent knoll (upper left), which two members of the party climbed.

The only prominent landmark is the basalt-capped Mt Yengo (668 metres), which rises well above the surrounding plateau. The mountain can be seen from most vantage points between the Hawkesbury and Hunter valleys.

At first glance, it might seem that the most remarkable aspect of the park is that there is *nothing* remarkable. There aren't any noted

book to the region was published in 2001 by Anthony Dunk. Unlike many National Parks, Yengo has no live-in rangers or rules by which bushwalkers must abide. Walkers may start their trips without permits, camp-site bookings or entrance fees. Visitors may enter the park at any time, walk anywhere, pitch a tent anywhere, and light camp-fires anywhere. There are no railings, fences, 'keep

out' warnings, 'prohibited' signs or any other evidence of regulation by the National Parks & Wildlife Service.

Over the years, we have made a few independent attempts at visiting the river, captivated by the challenge of its inaccessibility. As we ticked off more and more destinations around Wollemi National Park, the Blue Mountains, Kanangra-Boyd National Park and Morton National Park, the lure of

in Yengo than in just about any other major National Park in eastern Australia.

We have both tried to approach the river by way of Howes Range, off the Putty Road. It is probably the closest and most practical vehicle track to the river. However, the disparity between reality and the map is great. Well before Floyd trigonometry point, the track peters out and the ridges become indistinct; the danger of descending by a nameless spur is ever present. On a previous attempt, Sven pushed north to Toorwai Creek to investigate swimming opportunities. On another occasion, Anthony had to turn back after attempting to traverse the length of Howes Range as a day-trip.

After an aborted attempt on the middle Macdonald River by following the Wallaby Swamp fire track, Sven gave up and turned his attention to parks interstate. Anthony's perseverance paid off and he completed several reconnaissance trips during 1999 and 2000, reaching the river from the east, west, north and south—all invaluable research for his guidebook.

At Easter 2001, we decided to join up all the entry points, walk down the Macdonald and emerge into private farm land north of St Albans. Once on the riverbed, it'd be a simple trudge. No climbing uphill, no naviga-

We met at the picturesque St Albans pub and drove north, as close to the southern end of the park as practical. A gate marked where we would emerge in a few days' time. We then had a long drive back to the Hawkesbury River. We explored a direct route from Wisemans Ferry to Colo Heights on the Webbs Creek ferry and the 'Bicentennial Road' to Wheelbarrow Ridge. The Putty Road then leads north to the Wallaby Swamp fire track which, in turn, leads east into ever narrowing scrub.

After we had been sitting in the car for more than four hours, Anthony decided that he'd had enough of seeing the bush go past the windscreen, so we got out and walked. It was already past 1 pm. Our packs were ultralight; Sven had substituted sandals for boots and an SLR for a medium-format camera, Anthony had only matches instead of a stove and Luke decided that even the tent was superfluous, opting for a bivvy-bag.

The first stretch was a dry ridge. In summer it would have been stifling but in April even during the hottest part of the day the temperature was comfortable. The overgrown track gave way to light undergrowth as we began to descend by a spur. A few cautious stops confirmed our position—with help from our orbiting friends in the sky. As we

Sand



Yengo manifested itself as the last frontier within easy reach of Sydney.

The topographical maps show few navigable roads near the middle Macdonald River. Access from Gosford is laborious but the biggest challenge in the park is navigation. Due to the absence of tracks, signs or any distinguishing features in the terrain, the traditional map and compass are quite inadequate. The wooded ridges and spurs are all of similar height and have no discernible pattern. If you take a false spur and are forced into an unnamed creek, progress can be painfully slow due to the boulders and undergrowth. Consequently, a GPS is more useful



Mt Yengo (668 metres) dominates the distant northern horizon (background). Yengo National Park contains some of the most pristine wilderness close to Sydney.

tional problems, nothing. This would not be a *Survivor* III.

As Easter approached, the weather forecasts were kind and the weather even kinder. How many years must one go back to recall a clean sweep of fine skies on all four days of Easter? Joining us were Luke Binsted from Sydney University Bushwalkers and Noelene Proud from Western Australia.

had suspected, the map could not be relied upon to represent the indistinct terrain but Anthony had been here before so there was little cause for concern.

We had lunch less than an hour from the car. This set the scene for what was going to be a relaxing walk, otherwise known as a 'bludge trip'. We stopped again at a rock ledge soon after for a view across to Mt Bul-

galaben. Below us wound the Macdonald River in a tract that was too steep to be called a valley and too shallow to be called a gorge.

A nameless side creek allowed us to circumvent some tricky rock ledges. We quickly descended about 140 metres and boulder-hopped along the dry bed until we came to the flat, sandy expanse of the Macdonald, the width of a major freeway. It was something of an anticlimax to realise that the most difficult part of the walk was now over. The party changed into river-walking mode by packing away boots and proceeding south. The remainder of the trip was all downhill.

The first surprise that strikes visitors to the Macdonald River is that there is no river. It's largely under the sand. The second surprise is that there's only sand: no boulders, no rocks, not even pebbles—ever. Furthermore, the riverbed is entirely free of fallen trees or washed-up branches. There's hardly a twig. During dry periods, four cars could drive side by side along the river for almost its entire length between the northern and southern park boundaries in virtually uncompromised wilderness. All other rivers in the sandstone regions around Sydney have sections blocked by boulders and trees. Only short sections of the Wolgan, Capertee and Colo Rivers are similar in character—sediment builds up due to clearing upstream.

At first we theorised that periodic flash floods must cleanse the river of debris, but we were unable to explain the absence of boulders. We came to the dramatic conclusion that the riverbed is a giant quicksand, swallowing everything that lands on its surface. Like other rivers in Sydney's sandstone areas, the cliffs above must occasionally dislodge some massive boulders on to the riverbed and no doubt every few years some of the massive bluegums growing on the sloping banks must topple over; all evidence of such decay was buried. Note: pitch your tent well above the wet sand. You don't want to wake up underground!

The river twists at right angles, allowing the late afternoon sun to touch the riverbed. We made camp midway between the confluence of Bulgalaben Creek and Toorwai Creek. Bends usually offer the most aesthetic camping areas as they have raised, sandy platforms and views from both sides.

For warm-weather trips to the sandstone parks surrounding Sydney, much equipment can be left at home. Cooking can be done on a fire, sand substitutes for a sleeping-mat and numerous deep, rocky overhangs shelter campers from the elements. If you confine

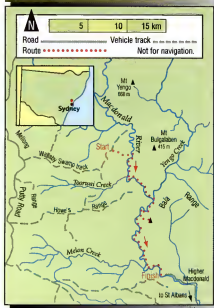
The riverbed of the Macdonald is framed by tall eucalypts and occasionally thicker, greener foliage as side creeks enter. The banks are steep at times but a quick exit is possible. We stopped numerous times and shed clothes as the day grew hotter. Not once did we see a set of footprints or any other evidence of humans; it was idyllic. The only thing really missing was a swimming-hole—the water generally wasn't more than 30 centimetres deep.

The major highlight was Yengo Creek, where Anthony had—unbelievably—seen



The fading afternoon light illuminates a sandstone ledge. Far below the Macdonald River snakes its way south towards St Albans and Wisemans Ferry.

Yengo National Park



your trip to river walking, boots can also remain in the cupboard. Even the super-duper, high-tech, state-of-the-art, breathable, multilayered, wind resistant, mesh-lined, titanium-zippered, name-brand shell top can be left behind.

The next day we arose to profound stillness. A morning fog hung over us, denoting a bright day ahead. It lifted as we broke camp. Continuing downstream, each member walked separately, enjoying the tranquil ambience. Seven photographed the low morning sun in the various permutations offered by the twisting watercourse while Anthony scamped up to investigate a deep overhang.

In such flat, open space we could walk more than four kilometres an hour even though it felt like a stroll. In four hours we had covered about 18 kilometres and it would have been feasible to complete the full 30 kilometres to the car before dusk. The sand was firm and we rarely sank in further than to our ankles. The additional

tyre tracks on a previous visit. Fortunately, there is little damage four-wheel drives can do to the ever changing riverbed. In fact the quicksand has claimed its fair share of victims who have misjudged the sand's solidity. Who knows what interesting things you might find under the sands of the Macdonald?

surface area of our sandals helped to keep our feet above the surface but the incessant chafing of sand between the straps and our feet made the latter quite painful. Snowshoes would have been interesting.

We made camp on another broad, sandy bank just after 2 pm. There was even a spot for a shallow dip due to a deepening of the water.

Anthony explored downstream while Noeline read by the river. Luke and Sven headed up to a cliff-top to get a different perspective. The knoll for which they aimed

we learned to be careful what to wish for. The three metre fall resulted in nothing more than light grazing, and the two walkers returned to camp as it became engulfed in darkness.

On the final day the river broadened and we came across the first evidence of civilisation in the form of tyre tracks. Cleared land was also more prevalent. On a previous

Wildlife is infrequently seen in Yengo; however, numerous tracks in the sand along the bed of the Macdonald River indicate that there is a healthy population of wallabies, snakes, lizards, and dingoes. You may encounter brown snakes on the dry ridges during summer. Along the river, bellbirds, cockatoos, and various water birds are often seen or heard.

'We came to the dramatic conclusion that the riverbed is a giant quicksand, swallowing everything that lands on its surface.'

visit Anthony had met an alternative lifestyle. This time he wasn't around.

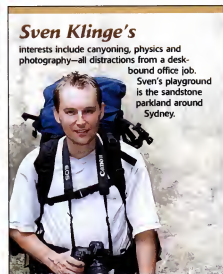
We soon left the National Park and strode past pumpkin fields, arriving at the car at about 10.30 am. While most people seeking relaxation over Easter were competing with the hordes, we had successfully escaped to a refuge that very few people ever visit. We estimated that only one or two parties a year walk the Macdonald River.

Yengo National Park

Yengo National Park is just east of Wollemi National Park and is about a third of its size, thus it is huge in its own right. Yengo has recently been included in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area—a series of

It is thought that the area was the home of Aboriginal people for at least 11 000 years before the arrival of Europeans in Australia. Evidence is on exposed rock platforms throughout the park, including Finchley Look-out, Devils Rock, Howes Range and Womerah Range. According to Aboriginal legend the demon-spirit of the Wollombi tribe, Waboo-ee, stepped from Devils Rock to Mt Yengo and then up into the sky. When you view the distinctive, flat-topped profile of Mt Yengo from a distance it is easy to understand the story.

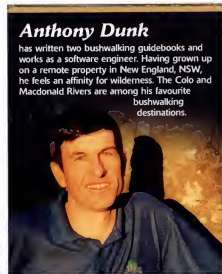
The Macdonald River flows for about 50 kilometres through the wilderness. In his book *Bushwalks in the Hunter Valley*, Greg Powell calls the river a 'highway of sand'. It is a superbly apt description.



Sven Klinge's

interests include canyoning, physics and photography—all distractions from a desk-bound office job.

Sven's playground is the sandstone parkland around Sydney.



Anthony Dunk

has written two bushwalking guidebooks and works as a software engineer. Having grown up on a remote property in New England, NSW, he feels an affinity for wilderness. The Colo and Macdonald Rivers are among his favourite bushwalking destinations.

is an unnamed headland protruding off the Bala Range, and we doubt that anyone has climbed it before. It was a 200 metre climb to some rock ledges which give access to the top. There were great views to the setting sun and you can trace the river's course through much of the park. The basalt cap of Mt Yengo dominates the horizon to the north.

Getting down is always tougher than going up and sandals aren't the best footwear for rocky scrambling. Wishing to avoid the technicalities of the route up, Luke and Sven chose a different way down between the ledges, which became hair-raising. At one point, the leaf litter underneath Sven's feet gave way and he tumbled down the slope, over the edge and crashed down on to the next ledge, centimetres from a potentially fatal fall. After countless bush excursions, it was Sven's most serious accident. A bit of excitement had been lacking until then but

beautiful National Parks that stretch for more than a hundred kilometres along the mountains west of Sydney.

Yengo is generally dry country; it gets about 800 millimetres of rain a year. Rocky ridges emerge from an open forest of bloodwoods, iron-barks and grey box. The damper environment of the Macdonald River supports impressive stands of Sydney blue gums, and the boulder-strewn side creeks are the home of turpentines, water gums, figs, lilly-pilly and coachwood. On the flanks of Mt Yengo and Mt Wareng, isolated groups of kurrajong and fig trees grow in the fertile, basalt soil.

The large sand load in the river is thought to be the result of erosion from the clearing of land upstream. In 1966 the Soil Conservation Service examined the sand deposits and determined that logging activities were largely to blame for the increase, which also affected previously productive farm land downstream. A hundred years ago it was possible to reach the town of St Albans by boat; now the water is usually only a few centimetres deep.

Yengo National Park was damaged in the recent bushfires. See the article by Sven Klinge on page 26.

The Southern Ranges

Peter Franklin explores some of the wildest of the South-west. Photos by the author

WHY HAVE THE SOUTHERN RANGES BEEN the scene of so many major searches in recent years? The short answer is that the region is wild, exposed and subject to everything that Tasmania can throw at a bushwalker. The stories I have been told suggest that half—and possibly more—of the parties walking in the Southern Ranges do not reach their goal.

There are opportunities for moderate to hard walking in the ranges but it is important

not to go beyond your capabilities. Destinations such as Pindars Peak are sufficiently challenging for most, especially given the weather you may experience in the region.

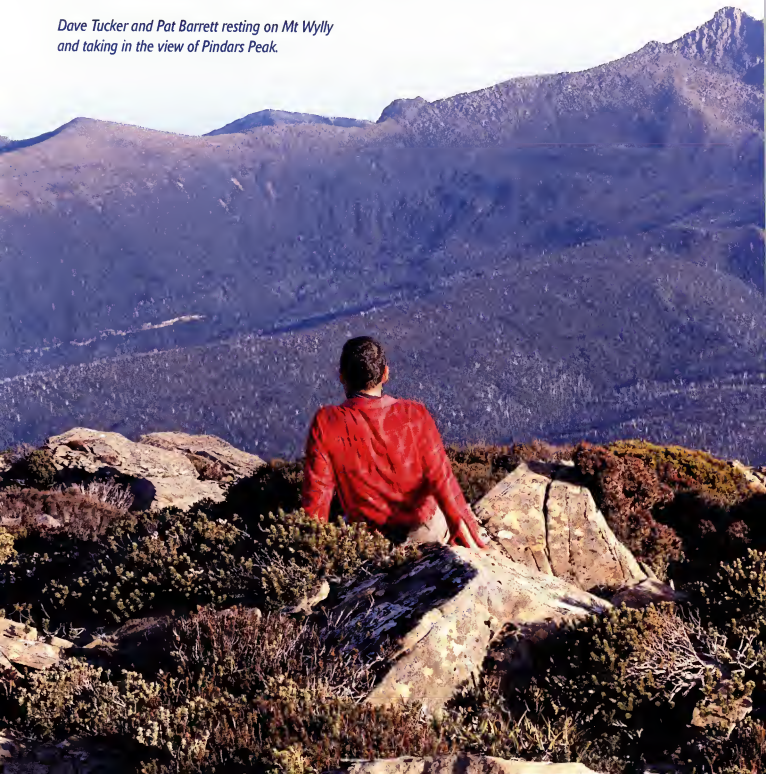
The high country known as the Southern Ranges is in the far southern corner of Tasmania. At the end of a line of mountains connected by distinct ridges is Precipitous Bluff. If the 'developers at any cost' had succeeded, Precipitous Bluff would probably have become a day walk. In 1971 there was

a move to mine limestone in the area; fortunately, conservationists fought the application through the courts and sanity prevailed.

Weather

If you have bushwalked in wild conditions the weather in the Southern Ranges might not seem too bad but for the average bushwalker it can be quite daunting. On the exposed ridgetops plants stay flat to the ground or behind rocks to survive. Those that might

Dave Tucker and Pat Barrett resting on Mt Wyllie and taking in the view of Pindars Peak.



be sizeable bushes elsewhere are pruned to tiny hedges the exact profile of the boulders that shelter them.

The extreme conditions exist because the area is exposed to the brunt of the westerlies that thrash the ranges. The mountains absorb the fury and shelter nearby settled areas which are relatively mild as a result. If you depart on a walk from the valleys east and north of the ranges you may have false expectations of the weather; however, climb-

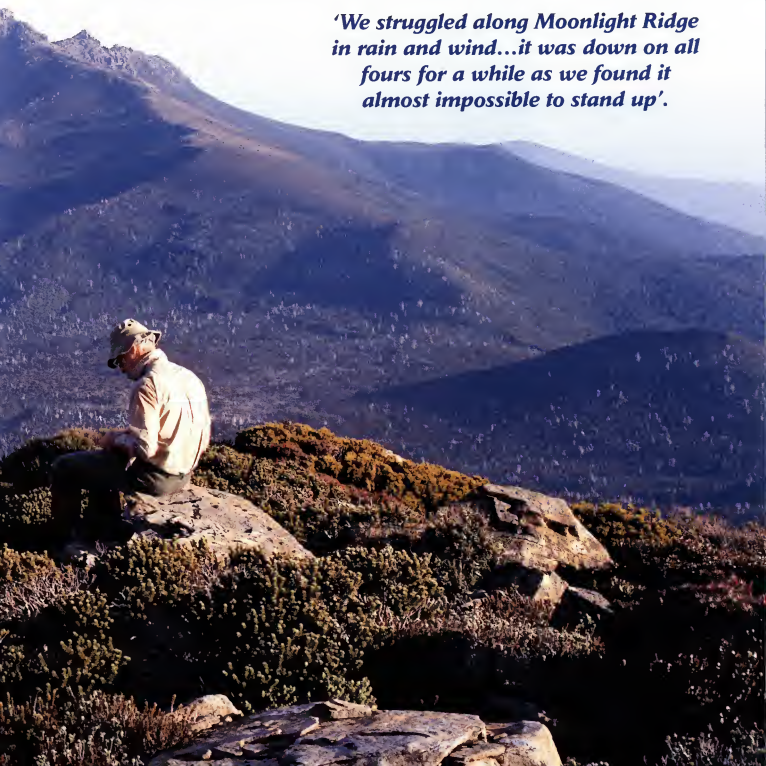
ing on the lee side through forest to be confronted by a chilly breeze will jerk you back to reality. When you reach the exposed top of the ranges you will feel the full force of the elements.

The most striking aspect of the weather is the ferocity of the wind and I well recall the sight of a reasonably solid friend leaning into the wind at a sharp angle and attempting—unsuccessfully—to make forward progress. On one occasion I was leaning sideways into

the wind. Eventually I walked into a sheltered area behind a large rock and immediately fell over as the force lessened so abruptly.

My wife Sue's journal for one trip reads: 'Had to force ourselves into the wind over the hill. It was so strong it completely blew me over and out of control. We struggled along Moonlight Ridge in rain and wind...it was down on all fours for a while as we found it almost impossible to stand up.' In my own notes from one occasion is the

***'We struggled along Moonlight Ridge
in rain and wind...it was down on all
fours for a while as we found it
almost impossible to stand up'.***



comment: 'I have come across some strong winds over the years, but never anything to equal what hit us on Moonlight Ridge. Even when leaning forward at 45° it sent us backwards. Water was just blown straight out of pools.'

Don't get the impression that the weather is always bad as many days are mild and balmy and in summer the high temperature can be decidedly uncomfortable.

Water

As the Southern Ranges get more than 2000 millimetres of rain a year, you could be forgiven for thinking that fresh drinking-water would be easy to find—even the eastern foot of the range gets 1400 millimetres. Most of the 80 or so rain-free days each year are in the summer months and dry spells can last for several days. When combined with evaporation and the sharp drainage of the ridges, a lack of rain can make finding water difficult.

Vistas

From the east the initial impression of the Southern Ranges is that they are harsh and wind-swept; the further you go the easier it is to appreciate the charm of alpine meadows, cushion plants and sundews, tarns

from sea level to about 1000 metres, a peak with many caves and sink-holes and capped by 300 metre cliffs of dolerite. It is possible that there have not been any fires on the western side for some 500 years or more but unfortunately to the east there is plenty of evidence of fire. Until about 20 years ago bushfires were common on the nearby coast but fuel-stove-only areas and public edu-

Howard, spent about 12 days holed up in the scrub before being rescued.

Navigation skills are crucial and it is extremely risky to venture off track in the limestone regions. Make use of a map and compass and, ideally, a GPS and obtain information from others. The absolute minimum effort required for safety is to spend time scanning the likely way ahead. With-



Precipitous Bluff, the monarch of the Southern Ranges, is approached over the two knobs in the middle ground. Left, Pindars Peak (1250 metres) as seen from Maxwell Ridge.

and streams, wind-scarred terraces, natural gardens and of course the mountain peaks rising from the sweeping ridgeline.

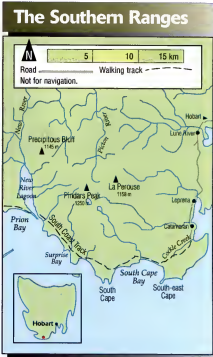
Around you are glacial valleys and cirques; Mt La Perouse is a flat-topped, wind-eroded hunk of sandstone and siltstone with a series of little dolerite tors known as the Cockscomb; Pindars Peak and its outliers are sharp points of dolerite. Below the main ridgetops are steep, scrubby slopes and tortuous gullies—forest takes over below the scrub.

Far to the west lies the monolith, Precipitous Bluff, a band of limestone rising

cation have improved the situation so that fires are now relatively uncommon.

Navigation

Anyone walking in the Southern Ranges should proceed with caution as it is dangerous country. A walker disappeared without trace in the limestone hill country above Lune River in 1984, as did Wade Butler in the vicinity of Precipitous Bluff in 1995. In the summer of 2000–2001 two walkers went missing, one was the notorious Ben Maloney (see *Wild* 81); the other, Mark



out the knowledge and navigation aids it is very unwise to push on if the weather denies you a clear view; those with little experience shouldn't attempt this type of walk alone.

As is the case with most of the well-known walks in Tasmania, many other people have gone before you. The country, especially the alpine terrain, is often fragile and easily damaged by boots so there will be pads—it takes very few walkers to create one. Tracks generally follow a logical route (walkers don't make special efforts to find the hardest way). So if you can't see any

have had to adapt to wooden platforms. It must be emphasised that camping is the great problem because you need sites that are reasonably flat and have reliable water, within a day's walk of each other. Some sites are very unpleasant in wet weather and they are often eroded. Nevertheless, you should stick to the existing ones rather than create new sites.

Moonlight Creek is the first recognised camp-site reached from Lune River but it is uninviting and one of the Pigsty Ponds sites is not the best in the wet. Near the creek between the two Reservoir Lakes camping

and east along the South Coast Track to Cockle Creek. Nevertheless, there are other options if you haven't the seven to ten days required for the big walk.

The walk described can be divided into four sections which range from distinct alpine tracks to an ill-defined and at times scrubby pad; it later becomes a route beside the New River Lagoon and eventually joins the South Coast Track. It must be emphasised that the two middle parts are inherently risky. The different sections provide varying degrees of challenge and the PWS has classified the tracks accordingly. In order not to



The Cockscomb on Mt La Perouse.

evidence of use and/or it just doesn't look the best way, it's time to halt and take stock.

Facilities

The tracks for the walks are of different grades, partly as a result of impact on the softer soils of the more heavily used area up to Pindars Peak. The Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service (PWS) considers the track from Lune River to Pindars Peak to be fairly well defined. A section has been stabilised and some environmental-protection track work for has been done in the badly eroded ascent to Moonlight Ridge during the last few years.

From Pindars Peak to Precipitous Bluff and down to New River Lagoon is a track where walkers have to use their own initiative and can expect to come across a bit of scrub.

Camp-sites

As in many parts of Tasmania, camp-sites are quite limited and become degraded from overuse; this is one of the reasons why walkers

is quite good. Ooze Lake has only two small tent spots that provide any shelter. Do not camp on nearby exposed moorland as it is very fragile. Between Ooze Lake and Low Camp are several saddles; all are exposed and water is unreliable after a dry spell but they are soggy the rest of the year.

A hardened camp-site has been constructed on the terribly degraded Precipitous Bluff Low Camp to protect the environment; plan the trip so that you can use it. That way you are helping the viability of the area as a walking destination. The Low Camp is based on a new design and has logs sawn into smallish sections and laid grain up. Gaps are filled with peat and a boundary line is provided for tying down tents. The PWS would like to receive feedback—email: tracks@dpiwe.tas.gov.au

A walk

The ultimate walk is a circuit starting (or finishing) at Lune River to New River Lagoon

provide specific 'track-notes-style' advice, information on some parts of the walk is somewhat sparse or vague. The walk described is from Lune River to Cockle Creek but can be done in reverse.

The track starts near the site of a limestone quarry that was forced to close before it caused irreparable damage to the nearby cave system. Bullfrog Tams are reached after a dry, two-hour climb. This area is wet and has multiple pads—often six or more—created by walkers trying to avoid the bogs (try not to create new pads). It leads to Moonlight Ridge which has four distinct bumps known as Hill One, Hill Two, Hill Three and—you guessed it—Hill Four. The track has been hardened over parts of this stretch but at some saddles walkers are asked to fan out to avoid creating a track. It is best to walk randomly over any part of a relatively undisturbed alpine meadow rather than in a point-to-point line, thereby creating or entrenching a track.

A climb towards Maxwell Ridge soon brings you to a turn-off to Mt La Perouse. From the junction the track leads south-west, then climbs over Maxwell Ridge before descending to a saddle and sidling to Ooze Lake. From the lake some new track work leads to the start of an open route that ascends over cushion-plant slopes to pick up the track to Pindars Peak. From the crest of the ridge cross just under the north face of Pindars Peak to the north-west ridge. A pad runs along this very obvious ridge but

in sections it becomes confusing because of false leads.

The western side of the plateau before Mt Wyllie is rocky and a nice break from the scrub. After a dry spell, finding water along this whole ridge can be a problem but a small creek before the plateau is usually running. From Wyllie Plateau there is scaparia until you reach the wide saddle below Kameruka Moraine. Take great care as there are false leads through the scrub. A shallow creek flowing east has the only water until

until bushwalkers, land managers and the government can resolve a number of issues.

The first is whether the area is to be left to look after itself or whether there is a point at which degradation must be halted. To some extent the measures taken by the PWS to alleviate the environmental impacts of walkers suggest that intervention is the answer, but to what extent? Present strategies and those planned for the future involve track relocation, track hardening, more 'fan out' areas and more extensive erosion control.



Peter Franklin

At his late teens Peter was inspired by photos of the Tasmanian wilderness—it was the spark for a lifelong interest. He has bushwalked extensively in Tasmania and is particularly fond of the untracked alpine areas.



Prion Beach, New River Lagoon and the distant Ironbound Range from near Pindars Peak.

Precipitous Bluff Low Camp at the south-west end of the moraine.

From the Low Camp follow a new route to avoid a wet area. Where the route ends an obvious valley leads up to the summit plateau. At a junction with new stonework one track leads to the highest point while the opposite goes to the descent gully. On the descent is a reroute again shortly after you start down through the cliffs. It sidles to the old track and the long walk down to New River Lagoon. The next stage is only a route because it entails walking down the edge of New River Lagoon. Once you reach the South Coast Track at Prion Beach the track is obvious. Follow the South Coast Track for four days to Cockle Creek.

The future

The Southern Ranges are an example of an environment that will continue to suffer

The problem is exacerbated by the tacit encouragement to bushwalkers of increased facilities and track hardening. It appears that there is a limit to how many people the area can take. Continuous upgrades could cater for the growing crowd but in time the environment would change enormously.

Given the movement towards ecotourism and the need for more 'icon' tracks to relieve the pressure on other prominent walking locations, one solution has some appeal: the present camp-sites could be superseded by platforms tucked away in the shelter of the bush and fresh water could be supplied at these sites without changing the nature of the walking experience. Unregulated use is often the cause of track deterioration. Unplanned track formation around camp-sites, camp-site expansion and the setting up of unofficial new camp-sites also contribute to damage. ●

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* Compared to current Tamron 371D ‡ As of March 1, 2001. Based on Tamron comparisons with lenses in the same class. NB: The lens and Morpho Butterfly photos have been digitally combined. MAX1040

Mt Feathertop

A classic circuit in the Victorian Alps, by *Lucy Monie*



Monica Chapman surveys the view of Mt Feathertop from a camp-site near High Knob on the Razorback. John Chapman

THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT ROUTES TO Mt Feathertop in the Victorian Alps that the greatest difficulty is to choose which of the plethora of classic tracks to walk. The beauty of walking to Mt Feathertop is that it can be as energetic as you like. You can amble along the Razorback or you can make a heart-pumping ascent of the North-west Spur, otherwise known as the Tom Kneen Track. If you're coming from elsewhere in the Alps, an ascent of Diamantina Spur provides great views of the South-east Face of Mt Feathertop—it's well worth the early, steep section.

The attractions of Mt Feathertop and its environs range from the subalpine lushness of

creeks and river valleys to the stark beauty of the High Plains and alpine peaks above the tree line. The accessibility of the peak from Harrietville and Mt Hotham by way of the Razorback has put considerable pressure on the environment—on a day-trip to Feathertop on New Year's Eve in 1999 we counted no less than 40 tents outside Federation Hut. Tracks in the area are heavily used and it is vital that you adhere to the tenets of minimum-impact bushwalking to prevent further damage.

For an easy ascent from Harrietville, a three-day circuit encompassing the Bon Accord Track and the Razorback is a great

way to approach the peak and to view its neighbouring ranges. The walk described can be completed in two days but due to the lack of water along the Razorback the first day is relatively long.

When to go

The best time to walk in the area is from late October to early May. In summer it is often warm and dry during the day and water may be more difficult to find between campsites. Late October and November are popular as the spectacular alpine wild flowers are in season.

Safety

Campfires are not permitted in alpine National Parks, so carry a fuel stove for cooking. Huts are a feature of the area but they are for emergency use and it is essential that you take a tent. Keep in mind that Mt Feather-top is in an alpine area and that you should be prepared for all kinds of weather, including snow, at any time of the year. There is a water tank at Bon Accord Hut but it is advised that you check with Parks Victoria before attempting the walk (phone 1031 5755 0000). Parks Victoria recommends that you boil water from the tank before drinking.

Access

The walk begins and ends in Harrietville, 330 kilometres north-east of Melbourne. From Melbourne, follow the Hume Freeway to just north of Glenrowan. Take the Snow Road, then the Ovens Valley Highway to Myrtleford. Head through Bright to Harrietville. Cross the old school bridge and pass the shops and service station. Take a turn-off to the left just before a sharp left turn in the Alpine Road. Drive to the river and park near the Bon Accord four-wheel-drive track which is to the left of the road next to the river.

the walk AT A GLANCE

Grade	Easy
Time	Three days
Distance	28 kilometres (approximately)
Height gain	1382 metres
Type	Mountain scenery
Region	Victorian Alps
Nearest town	Harrietville
Start/finish	Bon Accord four-wheel-drive track, Harrietville (circuit walk)
Map	<i>Boyang Alpine Area</i> 1:50 000 sheet, part of the Vicmap Outdoor Leisure series.
Best time	Late spring–early autumn
Special points	Campfires are not permitted in the Mt Feather-top area

bridge over Miners Creek near its confluence with the Ovens River. Collect water as this is the last opportunity to do so until you reach Bon Accord Hut. Cross the bridge and begin the 700 metre climb to Bon Accord Hill. After an initial steep climb, the track drops off the crest of the spur for a slightly easier stretch before rejoining it below the hill, where clearings and a cool breeze will entice you to stop and rest. The track flattens out after Bon Accord Hill, skirting to the left of a small knoll for almost two kilometres to Bon Accord Hut. If you have arrived some time before dark, you may like to leave your pack and make the 450 metre climb (two kilometres) to the Razorback for superb views of Mt Buffalo, Mt Loch, the Fainters and—of course—the lofty peak of Mt Feather-top. The ugly scar of the Alpine Road and the customary line of cars at the head of the Razorback are best ignored—keep your back to them. Take thermals and/or fleece clothing

to climb rather than skirt the knoll and meet the track when it rejoins the ridge.

The track enters snow-gum forest shortly after regaining the ridgetop and winds its way through increasingly thick clusters of trees before dropping slightly to the left of the ridgeline. Take advantage of the many grassy clearings along this section to absorb the views and the peacefulness of the area (assuming it isn't overrun with other walkers). After about two kilometres you'll begin to climb again and eventually emerge from the trees to ascend Twin Knobs—for another worthwhile pause.

Press on; the highlights of the walk are within easy reach. You'll pass the turn-off to Diamantina Spur on your right as you descend from High Knob. The track skirts just to the left of the ridgeline past Molly Hill. Shortly afterwards you'll reach a junction in the track with a memorial cross behind which is Little Mt Feather-top. To



Monica Chapman at the foot of Bungalow Spur. John Chapman

or you may find yourself making a swift and very chilly descent to the hut after a quick look at the view—it is often very cold above the tree line when the sun has set.

Day two

Fill your water-bottles and climb to the Razorback. The ridge narrows shortly after the meeting of the tracks. Head north along the ridgetop until it descends into the Big Dipper. The track then skirts the next hill to the right and regains the ridgeline after a kilometre or so. In poor weather this sheltered section of the walk provides welcome respite from the ravages of the wind. If it is a particularly still and mild day, you may choose

your right (north-east) is a track that leads to Mt Feather-top and a more northerly branch leads to a T-intersection. From this junction you can turn left (west) to MUMC Hut and the North-west Spur or right (north-east) to reach the northern section of the Razorback.

From the junction next to Little Mt Feather-top make a left turn (to the west) for a short descent on a track to Federation Hut; the flat, grassy area near the hut is your campsite for the night. A water tank is at the hut or you may find water at a spring on a side track part of the way down Bungalow Spur.

If you have time and energy, drop your pack at the junction and head straight for Mt Feather-top. Follow the track north-east,

The walk

Take the Bon Accord four-wheel-drive track (which goes up Champion Spur) until it branches at Dickinson Creek; cross the creek to the Bon Accord Walking Track and continue to walk with the east branch of the Ovens River on your left. For the first three kilometres the track undulates gently. You'll pass abandoned mine shafts on your right. Soon after the mines, the track drops to a

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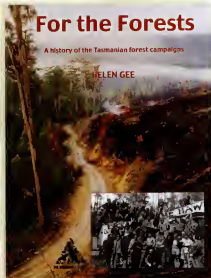
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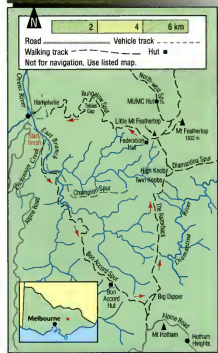
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passing the turn-off to the North-west Spur on your left. There has been a fair bit of track work up to the peak; make sure that you walk on the track so you don't contribute to the erosion around it. Climb switchbacks to the top and get ready for stupendous views in every direction.

Day three

As walking for the day is otherwise downhill, a second ascent of Mt Feathertop is almost obligatory! When you've bagged Mt Feathertop for the second time, return to Federation Hut and collect your pack. To the north of the hut is one end of the Bungalow Spur Walking Track which descends gently to the north-west, zigzagging rather than becoming steep. After some time it may feel rather relentless but it is a gentle grade most of the way. Just after Tobias Gap the track swings sharply west and then south before turning north at Picture Point and skirting the lower reaches of the spur towards Harrierville. You will notice distinct changes in the vegetation as you descend; the stunted snow gums around the tree line give way to

Mt Feathertop



taller and more slender gums. Eventually the trees become subalpine forest and finally the lush ferns and grasses of the creek-bed and valley floor.

At the end of the track is a road that leads to Harrierville. Walk downhill towards the east branch of the Ovens River, leaving the road when it turns right and follows the river towards the school bridge. Cross the river at the footbridge, turn left and walk along the track to meet the Bon Accord four-wheel-drive track where you left your car. 🚗

Lucy Monie is the Editor of *Wild*. Her happiest moments are above the tree line and her favourite walk to date has been a traverse of the Arthurs in Tasmania. She is slowly and painfully learning the Tao of the Telemark turn.

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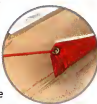
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Tents for bushwalking

A little house on the prairie, by John Chapman

THE SUNSET IS BEAUTIFUL AND YOUR TENT is pitched in the ideal place to appreciate it. Later you wake up to heavy rain and strong winds. How secure you feel will depend on the design and structure of the tent and your skill in selecting a site and pitching the tent securely. Some bushwalkers choose to stay down the hill or in the forest while others prefer to enjoy the view from the tent door. Individual walkers have varying needs, and manufacturers have responded with a wide range of designs. The tents in this survey are from the middle of the range in price and complexity and are suitable for bushwalking in areas where rain can be expected. This definition includes the wet season in the north and three-season use in the southern alpine areas.

Each supplier was asked to nominate three tents for general-purpose bushwalking. More models are available than are surveyed. Some brands were not surveyed as they are not available in the wide range of shops required for inclusion. (MSR tents were not available at the time the survey was conducted—see Equipment.)



This tent has every mod con—it's just a pity there isn't a tap to turn off the running water. Geoff Neely

pegs and stuff sacks. Ignore the lighter weights as you will usually need to carry the extras.

against the inner area), gear storage, head clearance and overall volume. My personal size (I am 1.8 m tall) and my experiences in a wide variety of tents have influenced this rating.

Intended capacity

Figures in this column represent the capacity stated by the manufacturers. Width is usually considered in capacity ratings but there is little regard for the length of potential occupants. If you are in doubt, try getting in with all your gear.

Design/shape

The designs are classified according to the pole layout. Tents that have crossing poles are called domes. Tents with parallel- or near-parallel poles are classified as tunnels. Tents with one pole only are classified as single hoop. Some of the domes surveyed are of a lightweight, hybrid design so don't expect the space or stability of a heavier snow dome.

Maximum internal dimensions

The largest measured sizes of the inner are indicated as follows: width by length by height. It is useful to know the dimensions although in some of the irregular designs the maximum length or width is not representative of the tent overall.

Total weight

The weights indicated in the survey include all the components required for bushwalking. Some manufacturers quote either Spartan- or in-use weights which omit items such as

Number of poles

If a half pole is listed it means that the tent has a short ridge-pole that does not extend to the ground. In the case of the two-pole domes the half pole is used to hold up the top of the vestibule to make access easier and to increase the storage volume. All tents surveyed have aluminium poles with shock-cord links. Poles are made in a variety of diameters and you should check carefully when buying a spare or replacement pole.

Pegs

The 'minimum pegs' listed in the pegs column is the number required to put up the tent and the fly. The maximum includes all peg- and storm gey points.

Number of vestibules

This column indicates the number of unfloored vestibule areas that can be used for gear storage.

Number of fly entrances

This column indicates the number of external doors into the tent fly.

Roominess

This rating takes into account the manufacturer's intended capacity (which is rated

Ease of pitch

Factors that determine how easy a tent is to pitch include continuous pole-sleeves and the sleeve width (some are narrow and tight) whether the poles cross (which makes it more difficult to erect) and how differences between pole- and material lengths are reconciled.

Stability

The rating in this column reflects the stiffness of a tent against side forces. As I wasn't able to test the tents in a wind tunnel this rating is subjective and is influenced by my experience of the performance of the different designs. Little features such as attachments between the fly and the inner, internal stiffeners and how well the panels are cut can make a big difference.

Access

This rates the ease with which I could enter the tent and sit down. Tents with high openings rate well whereas those with low or long entrances rate less so.

Value

This is not simply a value-for-money rating. I have considered the weight of the tent, its



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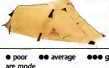
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Tents for bushwalking

			Intended capacity, people	Design/shape	Maximum internal dimensions, length x width x height	Total weight, kilograms	No of poles	No of pegs, min-max	No of vestibules	No of fly entrances	Roominess	Ease of pitch	Stability	Access	Value	Comments	Approx price, \$
Bibler USA																	
	Escalante Pinon	2	D		236 x 137 x 107	2.6	3	0-12	2	2	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●●●	●●●●	●●		850
	Escalante Juniper	3	D		244 x 183 x 122	2.9	3	0-12	2	2	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●●●	●●● 1/2	●●		1000
Eureka Korea																	
	Moonshadow Duo	2	T		240 x 144 x 109	2.4	2	5-15	1	1	●●	●●●	●●	●●	●●●●		300
	Autumn Wind	2	D		245 x 145 x 110	2.7	3	2-30	1	1	●●●●	●●●	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●●●		380
	El Capitan	2	D		228 x 152 x 115	3.7	2 1/2	4-14	2	2	●●●●	●● 1/2	●●●	●●●	●●●●		380
Fairlydown China																	
	Escape	2	T		215 x 100 x 105	2.5	2	4-10	1	2	●●	●●●●	●● 1/2	●●● 1/2	●●●●		400
	Assault II	2	D		215 x 130 x 110	3.2	3	2-18	2	2	●● 1/2	●●●	●●●●	●●● 1/2	●●●	Optional Easton poles	600
	Trios	3-4	D		245 x 200 x 115	4.6	4	2-18	1	1	●●●	●●●	●●●●	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2		700
Kaithandu China																	
	Voyager Plus	2	D		208 x 127 x 102	2.6	3	2-17	1	1	●●	●●●	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●● 1/2		600
	Northstar Plus	2	D		228 x 127 x 110	2.8	3	2-18	1	1	●●	●●●	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●● 1/2		700
	Mountain Plus	2	D		220 x 140 x 105	3.6	4	4-26	2	2	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●●●	●●●	●●		820
Macpac New Zealand																	
	Microflight	1	SH		220 x 130 x 100	1.8	1	6-10	1	1	●●●●	●●● 1/2	●●	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2		550
	Apollo	2	D		220 x 140 x 115	3.1	2	2-6	2	2	●●●	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●●		600
	Stellar	2	T		220 x 140 x 105	2.7	2	4-10	1	2	●● 1/2	●●●	●●●	●●●	●● 1/2		770
Mountain Designs China																	
	Piss NC	1	SH		260 x 110 x 110	1.9	1	6-11	1	1	● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●	●●●	●● 1/2		400
	Plateau NC	2	D		230 x 120 x 110	2.2	2	3-11	2	2	●●●	●●●	●● 1/2	●●● 1/2	●●●		480
	Ridge NC	2	D		210 x 140 x 115	2.8	2 1/2	2-12	2	2	●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●● 1/2	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2		650
Mountain Hardwear China																	
	Hummerhead 2	2	D		245 x 144 x 113	2.5	3	4-8	2	2	●●● 1/2	●●	●●● 1/2	●●●	●●●	Clear window	500
	Skyview	2	D		258 x 163 x 98	3.5	3	2-9	1	2	●●●●	●● 1/2	●●●●	●●●	●● 1/2	As above	600
	Trango 2	2	D		212 x 140 x 103	4	4.5	2-21	2	2	●●	●●	●●●●	●●● 1/2	●●	As above	800
Salewa China																	
	Macra	1-2	D		210 x 120 x 105	2	2 1/2	2-8	1	1	● 1/2	●●●	●●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●● 1/2		340
	Metolia	2	D		220 x 140 x 110	3.6	3	0-18	2	2	●●●	●●● 1/2	●●● 1/2	●●●●	●●●●		500
	Sierra Leone	2	D		230 x 155 x 110	3.3	2 1/2	4-12	2	2	●●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●● 1/2		570
Sierra Designs China																	
	Clip Flashlight	2	T		226 x 147 x 109	1.9	2	8-12	1	1	● 1/2	●●●	●●	●●	●●● 1/2		380
	Clip 3	3	T		244 x 191 x 119	2.5	2	8-12	1	1	●●●●	●●●	●●	●●● 1/2	●●●		490
	Orion	2	D		229 x 146 x 107	2.5	3	6-10	1	1	●●●	●●	●●● 1/2	●●●	●●● 1/2		500
Snowgum Vietnam																	
	Escarpment	2	T		230 x 140 x 95	2.5	2	4-9	1	1	●●●	●●●	●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●●●		350
	Storm Shelter 2	2	D		210 x 135 x 125	3.1	2 1/2	2-12	2	2	●●●	●● 1/2	●●●	●●●	●●●●		400
	Storm Shelter 3	2	D		210 x 170 x 125	3.9	2 1/2	2-12	2	2	●●●●	●● 1/2	●● 1/2	●●●	●●● 1/2		500
Wilderness Equipment Vietnam																	
	Second Arrow	2	T		200 x 120 x 102	2.5	2	3-7	1	1	●●	●●●	●●	●●●	●● 1/2	Titan-text fly available	500
	First Arrow	2-3	T		220 x 160 x 120	3.5	3	3-9	2	1	●●●	●●	●●	●●●●	●● 1/2	As above	700

● poor ●● average ●●● good ●●●● excellent Design/shape: D dome, T tunnel, SH single hoop The country listed after the manufacturer/brand name is the country in which the products are made

where are you?



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overall features and quality and its size as well as the price. If I have given a low rating it does not mean it is a poor tent, just that by my criteria I would not choose it for my own bushwalking use.

Buy right

- Lie down and make sure that the interior chamber is long enough for the tallest person. Sit up to test whether there is enough roof clearance.
- Is there sufficient space between the fly and the inner for ventilation? If the tent is pitched on uneven ground and the fly sags, will it touch the inner? Are there enough storm guys to enable you to adjust the tension and reduce sags?
- Entrance design varies and you should test how difficult it is to get in and out. Can each person enter and leave without disturbing the other occupant/s?
- In warm climates, you may only need an insect screen. Check whether it's possible to erect the inner without the fly.
- If you can, put up and take down a tent at least once before buying it, and ask questions. Can the poles be inserted from either end? Are they the same size? Is there a preferred order in which they should be inserted? Are the ends of the poles difficult to insert and can you make any adjustments so that the tent remains completely taut as it stretches and ages?
- Many tents use the door for ventilation. Check whether you can leave the door open when it is raining—some designs allow rain to fall directly on to the floor of the inner when the door is open.

Approximate price

This is the recommended retail price including GST. Price does sometimes give an indication of the amount of effort that went into the design. Tents made in Australia and New Zealand are generally more expensive but they are almost always of excellent quality. Tents from Asian countries can also be of high quality but vary more—examine little things like stitching, placement of features such as vents and internal pockets, the materials used and even ask about the company's reputation regarding tents.

Availability

The tents surveyed are not all available in any one shop. Tents require a lot of floor space and are expensive to stock—most shops have only two or three brands and usually only some models are on display. To see a wide variety of tents it is necessary to visit a number of shops. ☹

Bushwalking writer John Chapman has been contributing to *Wild* since issue one. His favourite place is still Tasmania although he regularly visits all other Australian States.

This survey was refereed by Greg Coire.

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Trekking poles

More fun than you can poke a stick at, by *Tristan Campbell*

TREKKING POLES—WHETHER YOU USE THEM to fend off rabid possums, lean on them while gasping for breath after a hard ascent or even use them for walking—are quickly becoming a common bushwalking and trekking 'accessory'. Trekking poles relieve strain on the knees, especially during descents, provide greater balance on tricky ground and give your arms something to do during the day. However, before you rush out and buy a pair, there are a few aspects to consider when replacing the humble stick.

Weight

This is an important consideration. Many people are hesitant to buy trekking poles because of the increased weight. Light poles are one solution but they are generally not as strong, so be sure to compare the weight with the sturdiness rating.

Minimum and maximum length

It's very important to know these in order to stow the poles when you are not using them. Longer poles are generally sturdier

Buy right

- The most important question when buying trekking poles is how and how much do you plan to use them. Are you planning to use the poles occasionally and would you like them to relieve pressure on your knees? Do you have something more serious in mind? Whatever you are doing, remember that the poles are to be used for walking. So walk around the shop. I have yet to see a shop that has rocks, swamps and steep sections to test trekking poles adequately but by walking around the shop with the poles adjusted correctly you can get a fair idea of how well they suit you.
- As your choice of trekking poles will ultimately be decided by many different personal requirements, I won't bother going into my own. I'll just say that it's a very good idea to test all the features in the different poles, experiment with different heights and generally try to work out what features you will actually need.
- If you invest in one pole, you should probably buy two. If you're using a pole for stability, you won't know which way you're going to fall before it happens; if you're using only one pole on flatter ground, you'd better switch arms relatively often to avoid getting an overdeveloped arm on one side!



One of the many areas in Tasmania where off-track walking is not recommended. Davo Blair

but they can be a real pain to strap on to a day pack if they are longer than the pack itself. They also weigh more.

Number of segments

Two segments are lighter and stronger than three- or four-segment poles if the segments are made of similar materials but poles with fewer segments don't pack down to as small a size. Once again, this is difficult when you are trying to attach the poles to a day pack.

Antishock

If you would like poles to give you greater comfort and support when walking, antishock systems are fantastic as they greatly reduce the jarring on your wrists. However, if you're trying to move quickly, the effort expended in compressing the antishock device before you can actually push off the ground may become rather annoying after a couple of days. To counter the bouncing, some systems, such as the triple-spring from Leki, allow you to adjust the firmness of the

springs in the poles; you can't completely lock the springs out but it alleviates the effort of walking quickly with sprung poles.

The antishock systems are generally spring-loaded but a couple of other systems now on the market use a small section of rubber in the pole to reduce shock. These don't give as much as a spring system and so are great middle ground between sprung and rigid poles.

Angled handgrip

Trekking poles with an angled handgrip are more 'aggressive' and most people find them more comfortable to use. The extent of your comfort level with angled handgrip poles depends on how you use them. Some people keep the pole swing similar to the swing of their arms—placing the tip in the ground in front of their body while others place the tip of the pole on the ground level with their body. The second method gives you greater forward force when walking. The angled handgrips can make your wrists uncomfortable with the poles at some angles.

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Polarity

Stand out from the crowd on your next bushwalk,
by Davo Blair

SINKING UP TO YOUR CRUTCH IN MUD AS you struggle across the 'sodden Loddon' Plains on the way to Frenchmans Cap, you think to yourself: 'If only I had a depth probe.' Trekking poles may be the solution.

Compared with walkers in North America and Europe, few Australians use trekking poles but sometimes they are used by people with a dodgy knee or ankle. They certainly do help with bad knees. Poles have enabled me to do some walks that I could not have done otherwise and have made others much more pleasant. But whether your knees are strong or shaky, there are good reasons why you might consider taking that bit of extra weight on a walk.

Trekking poles reduce impact on your leg joints by transferring weight to your shoulders and arms. You can avoid jarring your knees on downhill stretches, you are able to lower yourself more gently down steps and you can reduce the landing impact while rock hopping. As you are using your whole body, muscles in your legs do not become as fatigued, joints are not as stressed and as a result you can carry a heavy pack more comfortably.

What are the other benefits? The most obvious is balance. Losing your balance and falling is embarrassing and tiring at best. Another is environmental protection. Degradation by track widening is a significant problem on muddy sections in Tasmania and elsewhere; it is mostly due to people walking round deep mud holes. Poles can also reduce the depths to which you sink by spreading your weight over four points and taking some of it off your feet. Further erosion can be limited by reduced handling of vegetation on really steep terrain—you can push yourself on your poles rather than yank yourself up or lower down off plants.

Trekking poles can also be useful when you've finished walking for the day. They can replace broken tent poles; they can be erected to form a small clothes-line; they can serve as a camera 'tripod'—you'd need three poles for a tripod—they can be buried in sand or snow as tent pegs or used as a toilet trowel or even as goal posts for that game of alpine soccer. In emergency situations they can be handy as splints or crutches.

If poles are so wonderful, why don't we all have them? For starters, they are expensive and you really need two. A single pole helps a bit but to get maximum benefit, two are necessary. Do you need the ones with suspension, tilted grips,

graphic equaliser and built-in spa? Not really. Having walked with top-of-the-line suspension poles and cheaper, unsuspended ones, I actually prefer the latter. With the former, I found that the suspension took more effort to use and I could not propel myself forward as easily. For the one or two centimetres of bounce, I found my elbows could more than make up the difference. It's possible to 'lock off' suspended poles but I wonder why you'd bother to pay for the extra technology and weight of these poles. I have also found suspended poles to be noisier as the internal spring mechanism is punched at each step. A small thing but it can be annoying day in, day out—especially for other walkers. Rigid poles also relieve pain around the hip-pocket. Cheaper poles aren't necessarily lower in quality; you are simply buying a less complex item.

Another problem with trekking poles is that not all terrain is suitable for them. In scrubby sections or really long grass you may be fighting your poles more than using them as they catch in surrounding vegetation. Similarly, on rock scrambles where you need to hang on to holds with your hands, having a pole around your wrist is less than useful.

Poles do not suit everyone. You need to have reasonable upper-body strength and coordination to get the maximum benefit from them. However, the biggest problem with poles—far worse than jabbing your mate in the back of the leg for the tenth time that day, catching the tip between boardwalk planks for the hundredth time that day or getting a pole between the legs as you attempt that short rock pitch that looked easy from the ground—is having yet another approaching walker ask you with a big grin, 'Hey mate, where are your skis?'

If you are not sure whether the benefits outweigh the embarrassment of poling through alpine meadows in summer, borrow or hire some or use ski poles and see whether they help. I was genuinely surprised just how much difference they made to my walking capabilities and my knees.

The next time you are faced with a soupy mud hole, a long hard hill or a short rock hop across a swollen river, think how difficult that section of track would have been if you had never given the poles a try. Who needs skis? ☺

Davo Blair has spent much of his life walking, climbing and cycling in wilderness areas in many countries. He is a professional photographer, raising awareness of endangered species and places by his pictures.

Sand/snow baskets

Where do you plan to use the poles? Baskets are useful in all situations, except in dense bush where they get caught on the most unlikely objects. The baskets are great in sand and indispensable in Tasmanian mud! In mud, a good, firm push with a pole and a snow basket gives you a fairly good idea of just how much of you will be swallowed up when you plunge in. It also gives you a wider surface area with which to probe for submerged roots and other such items.



1 Black Diamond Ascent; 2 Charlet Moser Galaxy Compact; 3 Gabel Classic; 4 Jacko Prostar; 5 Leki Super Makalu Antishock Positive Angle Cortec; 6 Tracks Compact Travel Staff.

Other features

In the 'Comments' section are various additional features. Probably the most significant is the mechanism used to lock the poles at a particular length; Black Diamond uses a relatively new system called 'FlipLock' in some models. This system is faster and easier to use than the traditional twist-lock style that is used in most other products.

However, the twist-lock system can be easily fixed in the field—simply carry one or two spare expansion units which may be available in outdoors shops that stock the poles. It's important to remember that the twist-locks are available in various sizes, so get the right size. I found that the FlipLock mechanism didn't always lock as firmly as the twist-lock variety.

Sturdiness/robustness

Are the poles Hard Yakka or not? Bear in mind that the points of highest stress are the locking mechanisms and to a lesser degree the handles, straps and tips. The strength of other parts of the poles have been considered but it is the locking mechanism that makes or breaks poles—literally. However, a

Trekking poles

	Weight, grams	Minimum/maximum length, centimetres	No. of segments	Antishock	Angled hanging Sand/snow baskets	Design	Sturdiness/robustness	Value	Comments	Agency price, \$
Black Diamond Italy										
Ridge † ‡	310	82–140	2	N	N	Y	●●	●●	Aluminium shaft, replaceable carbide tip, FlipLock™	50
Approach †	285	63–135	3	N	N	Y	●●●	●●	as above	65
Ascent †	300	70–135	3	Y	N	Y	●●●	●●	as above	100
Charlet Moser Czech Republic										
Galaxy Compact † ‡	265	60–130	3	N	N	Y	●●●	●●		70
Galaxy TREK † ‡	308	75–145	3	N	Y	Y	●●●	●●		75
Gabel Italy										
X-Lander	288	76–146	3	N	Y	Y	●●	●●	Tungsten carbon tip	50
Classic	288	72–141	3	Y	N	Y	●●●	●●	as above	65
Edelweiss Compact	293	60–123	3	N	N	Y	●●	●●	as above	65
Jacko Taiwan										
Prostar	340	62–130	3	Y	Y	Y	●●●	●●	Aluminium shaft, Carbide flex-tip	70
Royal	355	76–145	3	Y	N	Y	●●●	●●	Aluminium shaft, Carbide flex-tip. Camera and video mount	80
Carbon Stick AS	315	65–145	3	Y	N	Y	●●●	●●	Woven carbon shaft, Carbide flex-tip	120
Leki Czech Republic										
Wanderfreund Antishock	307	69–127	3	Y	N	SS	●●●	●●●	Triple-spring antishock, Cortec T handgrip. Good as single pole. Available without antishock	90
Makalu Ultralite Titanium Antishock	265	67–135	3	Y	N	SS	●●●	●●	Triple-spring antishock. Available without antishock	95
Super Makalu Antishock Positive Angle Cortec	310	83–140	3	Y	Y	SS	●●●	●●●	Triple-spring antishock, Cortec handgrip	115
Tracks USA										
Trek'R 3 ‡	595	110–142	3	N	N	Y	●●	●●	*Sold as pair only (\$260)	130*
Sherlock Travel Staff #	460	108–146	2	N	N	N	●●	●●●	Locking system adjusts every 3 cm. Camera mount	170
Compact Travel Staff #	300	122–138	3	N	N	N	●●	●●	Push-button length adjustment. Camera mount	185

● poor ●● average ●●● good ●●●● excellent Weight: per pole \$5: sold separately RRP: per pole. Some poles have a reduced price per pole when a pair is purchased. # Tracks Travel Staffs are designed for use as single walking staffs † not seen by surveyor ‡ not seen by referee The country listed after the manufacturer/brand name is the country in which the products are made

Design

This is a reflection of how well the design of the poles match their intended use. There is a huge range of styles of bushwalking and trekking and there are many different styles and designs of poles as well. Check in the 'Comments' section to see whether the poles have been designed for a specific use.

high toughness rating doesn't mean that you can put your poles between a couple of trees and use them as a monkey bar! 🐒

Tristan Campbell has used trekking poles across most of the southern half of Australia and on the South Island of New Zealand. His best trips have been a traverse of the Arthurs Range in Tasmania and a visit to the Tin Range on Stewart Island in NZ.

This survey was refereed by Greg Cairn.

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Shoe box

Vento is Italian for wind; **Scarpa** tells us that its new **Vento footwear range** will make you 'hike like the wind! The **Vento** is a lightweight walking shoe with a suede/nylon upper, a moisture-wicking nylon lining, an antimicrobial mid-sole and a dual-density sole. The **Vento Mid** is for those who prefer more ankle support—it's the same model but with a higher ankle. The Vento is available in both men's and women's sizes, the women's boot is made on a narrower, lower-volume last. A pair of middle-sized women's Ventos weighs about 950 grams while the men's version weighs about 1010 grams. Available from **Paddy Pallin** shops. Vento RRP \$209, Vento Mid RRP \$229.

Another lightweight footwear option is the **Receptor** from **ECCO**. The bare human foot was the model for the Receptor footwear range. The designers apparently considered three stages of movement in the foot during each step: the heel contacts the ground; the pressure is transferred through the

foot; then the forefoot pushes forward and prepares for the next step. The boot incorporates features such as an Earth



The lightweight Vento Mid from Scarpa will make you 'hike like the wind'. Right, the Receptor from ECCO with 'Exo-skeletal Wrap-around shank'.

Sensing Unit shock absorber in the heel, a Three Finger Propulsion Plate in the sole, an Exo-skeletal Wrap-around Shank for stability and a Dual Axis Flex Channel function to support the movement of the foot and enhance power. With all those words beginning with capital letters, they must be good! The range includes sandals (800 grams, RRP \$199), mid-cut boots (1100 grams, RRP \$259) and rugged-terrain boots with a Gore-Tex membrane (1400 grams, RRP \$359). Call ECCO Shoes Pacific on (02) 8852 5600 for stockists.



MSR branches out

MSR has more than 30 years' experience in the design and manufacture of technical outdoors equipment; it is most famous for its stoves. The release of a new range of **tents** is certainly a new direction, and it hasn't been done by halves: the 2002 catalogue features no less than 16 tents and nine other shelters, including tarpaulins, bug shelters and 'wings'. For those who know Moss tents, the MSR range will look familiar: Moss has been 'integrated' with MSR and the range includes some Moss standards along with some new designs, all in the Moss grey-and-red colour scheme. The peg-out loops are large enough that you can use skis to peg out the four-season models, the ties are 'glove-friendly' and the tents have reflective trim and 'the world's first field-

repairable zipper'. Many of the tents have large mesh panels which would make fly-less three-season camping very pleasant. The tent bags are a departure from the cram-it-all-in sack; they are designed like rope bags—the bag is like a small tarp on to which you pile your tent, then roll and compress it.

The **Zoid 1** is from the Ultralight series: it's a one-person, two-pole, 1.6 kilogram tent. RRP \$419. The **Side Winder 2** is a three-season, two-person, two-pole tent; it weighs 3.1 kilograms. RRP \$749. The **Fury** is part of the four-season range: it's a two-person, three-pole tent with a large, poled vestibule and it weighs 3.4 kilograms. RRP \$995. See the MSR Web site: www.msrcorp.com or call **Sea to Summit** on 1800 787 677.

The new tents from MSR have a Mossy look about them. The Fury is pictured.



trix

Burning rubber
in the wet

An emergency fire-lighter.
by Stephen Banton

Lighting a fire in Australia is frighteningly easy. Eucalyptus wood is dry and ignites quickly; all you need is one match! When it rains and the wood is no longer dry and your hands are wet you may have some difficulty. Some organised people carry fire-lighters, which are a bit messy because they get crushed and crumble in your pack, making everything smelly. A less bulky alternative is a small piece of rubber-tyre inner tube. This is neater in your emergency kit and does the same job. It makes gucky smoke but when you're verging on hypothermia, you won't care. The only trick is getting a match or lighter going and then you have a guaranteed fire-lighter. Be aware of fire restrictions and fuel-stove-only areas; camp-fires are becoming a thing of the past even when you're cold and miserable.

Wild welcomes readers' contributions to this section; payment is at our standard rate. Send them to the address at the end of this department.

WALK.

Photo: Darren Davis

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New sticks

The stick you pick up from the ground while walking is becoming redundant as **trekking poles** rise in popularity. Although they are expensive, trekking poles have advantages: see the survey in this issue.

The **Overland Carbon** trekking/snow-shoeing pole from **MSR** is a new three-segment trekking pole made of carbon fibre. The poles have replaceable carbide tips, non-angled foam grips and come with trekking baskets. Each pole weighs 241 grams (which makes them lighter than any of the poles in the survey) and has a length range of 65–140 centimetres. Call **Sea to Summit** for stockists on 1800 787 677. RRP \$299 a pair.

Black Diamond has released a range of four new aluminium trekking poles: details are listed in the survey. The **Ascent** is the top-of-the-range pole and features a shock-absorbing, spring-loaded upper shaft which can be turned on or off. All four poles fit **Black Diamond's** Whippet Trek accessory which can be attached to the pole for glacier travel and used to self-arrest. Available from **Paddy Pallin** shops. See the survey for prices.

C-Ya soon

One Planet's range of **Street Gear** bags is the company's first foray outside the technical market. Urban satchels and bags are made with bright colours and reflective trim and we are told that they are of the same



*The **Psycho** day pack is one of the flash new bags from One Planet.*

construction and quality as One Planet packs. The bags have incongruously groovy names (this is one of Australia's top bushwalking gear manufacturers, after all!) such as **C-Ya**, which is an A4-size shoulder bag (RRP \$49.95); **Psycho**, a compact backpack (RRP \$69); and **Onya**, which is a 30 litre bike pack with an internal hydration sleeve, a light-attachment point and a helmet holder (RRP \$139). Designed and manufactured

in Australia by One Planet, for stockists phone (03) 9372 2555.

UV free


U-V Block is a sun-protection treatment for fabric. It is sprayed or brushed on to fabric, reportedly to give it an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) of 50+ (a white T-shirt may provide a UPF of 5—even less when wet). This means that your favourite shirt can get the treatment and save your skin on a long day in the sun. Distributed by **Anso**, phone (03) 9471 1500. RRP \$36.50 for 500 millilitres.

For those who would rather buy sun-protective clothing off the shelf, **Mountain Designs** is producing **travel garments** made from Sahara fabric which has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30+; shop staff tell us that the fabric also has a 'funky wicking ability'. Long-sleeved shirts and pants are available in men's and women's sizes; shirt RRP \$99, pants RRP \$129. **Kathmandu's Visor Shirt** is an SPF-40 shirt with a hidden flap under the collar that can extend to cover your neck—also available in men's and women's sizes. RRP \$99.50.

Knick-Knacks

* Following the report in this column in *Wild* no 83 that **Patagonia Australia** had been placed into voluntary administration, we were advised that it **ceased trading** in November, the month issue no 83 went to press. The advice, which came from Larry Adler Ski & Outdoor, informed us that Adler had taken over Patagonia Australia's remaining shop in Sydney and all assets. A major sale of ex-Patagonia stock followed.

* **Aquim** is a **hand sanitising gel** which is said to kill germs on the hands without soap or water. It may be useful in the outdoors where water is in short supply but hygiene is required—such as in big-wall climbing, walking in aid areas or for first aid. Available from pharmacies in 70 millilitre (RRP \$3.95) or 375 millilitre packs (RRP \$5.95).

* We are told that ciwujia is a herb that was first used by Chinese mountain climbers to boost energy. The herb is now available in capsule form, designed as a **nutritional supplement** for endurance athletes. **Durathon** capsules are said to shift your body's energy extraction from carbohydrate metabolism to fat metabolism, improving physical performance, slowing lactic acid build-up and decreasing muscle soreness and fatigue. A box of 60 capsules will set you back \$39; distributed by **Natural Icons**, call (03) 9556 5860. 

Products (on loan to *Wild*) and/or information about them, including colour slides, are welcome for possible review in this department. Written items should be typed, include recommended retail prices and preferably not exceed 200 words. Send them to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.



Join the Renewable Energy fan club.

Victorian water crisis

Logging in catchment areas is a significant factor in Victoria's present water crisis, reports Claire Miller in the *Melbourne Age* on 9 January. An expert committee has been appointed to report to the government on the various options to boost water-supplies or to reduce demand in the State.

The Water Resources Strategy Committee is evaluating the viability of shifting the logging industry out of catch-

passed into law in 1996. The director of forest management at the Department of Natural Resources & Environment (DNRE), Ian Miles, claims that the volume of timber required to meet contractual agreements could not be met without some logging in the catchment areas, despite the closure in 2001 of the region's largest sawmill, Thomas P Clark, whose timber had been supplied by public plantations.



ment areas, which would prevent a further decrease in the water yield. Water run-off is estimated to be roughly 50 per cent greater in mature forests, which require less water than the younger trees in coupes that have been replanted. Since 1992 successive Victorian governments have commissioned research into the link between logging in catchments and a drop in Melbourne's water-supplies; ten years ago consultants found that a no-logging policy would benefit the Victorian community by an estimated \$140–150 million. These findings were confirmed in a further inquiry in 1994.

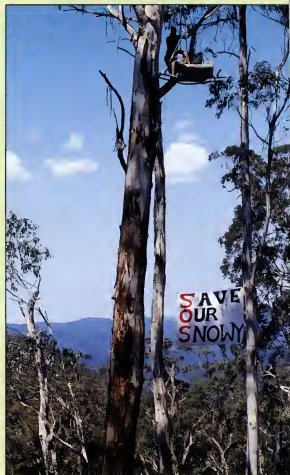
It appears that massive savings could be made by evicting the logging industry from the catchment areas—even when relocation costs and the local community funding shortfalls had been met. A complicating factor is the commitment made by the Kennett Government to supply timber to international buyers, some of which was

The committee is unlikely to recommend the building of a new dam and is considering the possibility of recycling waste water to increase supplies and improve efficiency to decrease demand on reserves.

A forest update in the *Friends of the Earth Newsletter* for summer 2002 reports that 60 coupes have been set aside in far north-east Victoria for logging in the next three years. Heavy logging is planned in the Mts Wills, Sassafras, Gibbo and Pinnibar regions. Most of these areas are within cooee of the Lake Hume water catchment and some coupes are in the heaviest rainfall areas of Victoria. The Victorian Alps provide about a quarter of Victoria's water-supplies—a very small region feeds a significant proportion of water into the Murray–Darling Basin. Friends of the Earth (FoE) estimates that the flow of about 210 creeks and tributaries will be affected by logging in the proposed coupes.

Scheming for the Snowy

Nestled in the upper north-east of Gippsland is the Yalmy River, bordered by the Snowy River National Park to the west and north and the Bonang Highway to the east. Yalmy's wilderness values and importance as a refuge for biodiversity have long been



Forest defenders up a eucalypt in the Yalmy River region, East Gippsland, Victoria. Eli Greig

recognised by conservationists. Its magnificent ridges rise to 940 metres from the Snowy River and the area gets an average of 1000 millimetres of rain a year; Yalmy is a major water catchment for the once mighty Snowy River.

The stands of old-growth eucalypts have been in the sights of the timber industry for years. Six coupes were gazetted in the catchment for the 2001–02 harvesting season and loggers have begun clear-felling.

The Regional Forest Agreement recognises Yalmy for its high conservation values (it is rated as highly as Coolengook and the protected Ellery Block) and its importance as a water-supply for the Snowy River. At a time when 'integrated catchment management' is a catch-phrase it is absurd that the

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Victorian Government continues to 'manage' sections of the Snowy River as though they were isolated from the remainder of the ecosystem.

In early November local conservationists set up a camp to protest the logging of this vital catchment—it is very much at odds with the strategic conservation measures in the Murray Basin which are to restore 15 per cent of the original upstream flow of the Snowy River.

Conservationists are calling for an immediate moratorium on logging in this area, citing recent State government reports which show that water yield and quality are adversely affected by clear-felling.

'It's an outrage that a national icon like the Snowy River is being sold out to overseas interests. Its upper waters are being sold to the French, while its lower catchments are being cleared and sold for a song to the logging industry', said Megan Boehringer, spokesperson for the Goongerah Environment Centre.

Conservationists are also calling for an extension of the adjacent Snowy River National Park to encompass the Yalmy forest.

Eli Greig

Blow-out

A blow-out in the rate of forest clearing in Australia was reported in *The Australian* on 20 November 2001. Based on the information provided by State governments, it was estimated that the national total of land cleared last year would be 560 000–570 000 hectares. However, according to the article in *The Australian* more than 588 000 hectares were cleared in Queensland alone; the national total was 687 000 hectares.

According to an article in the Melbourne *Age* on 10 December 2001 one analyst found that forests in Victoria's south-west are being logged at more than twice the sustainable rate. If an average of 445 hectares are logged each year in the area, it means that any given area will be relogged after only 50 years. The DNR stipulates that the rotation for coastal mixed forests is 120 years, which means that only 188 hectares ought to be available in the area for logging each year.

Banking on the oil palm

Following actions by FoE Netherlands and Greenpeace, three large banks in the Netherlands—ABN Amro, Rabo and Fortis—have decided to cease or drastically reduce their financing of oil-palm plantations which participate in the destruction of tropical rainforests.

The banks have indicated that they support FoE and Greenpeace demands. Another major bank, ING, does not. From 1995 to 2000 the banks financed oil-palm plantations in Indonesia for which tropical rainforests were destroyed. The local population depends on the forests for medicine, food and wood and was the first to suffer.

Since 1995, campaigning has focused on the banks with limited success until February 2001 when FoE initiated a postcard

action to which 20 000 people responded. Negotiations moved in the right direction after that. ABN Amro went a step further than the environmental organisations had asked; the bank's new policy will apply to all activities that threaten valuable forest areas.

FoE and Greenpeace are now considering further action against ING.

FoE

provides opportunities to lease buildings in National Parks. It is also easier for owners of holdings within parks to construct access roads through parks to their private land.

The *Environment and Planning (Ski Resorts) Act* removes the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) from the development-control process in relation to ski resorts in Kosciuszko National Park (KNP). The gov-



The presentation of the Wilderness Society's Environment Award for children's literature, a part of TWS's 25th anniversary celebrations. TWS

Ethical banking?

US-based environmental organisation Global Response (GR) claims that Papua New Guinea's moratorium on new logging has been allowed to lapse, violating the conditions of a World Bank loan. GR claims that the bank refuses to act in response to this failure of the PNG Government to fulfil its obligation under the loan conditions. According to GR, illegal logging along the Kiunga Aimbak road has caused serious damage as logs worth millions of kina are unlawfully removed, and protesting landowners have been imprisoned, beaten and tortured.

▲ Act now

Email World Bank President James Wolfensohn at cunit3@worldbank.org expressing concern regarding the bank's conduct in PNG rainforests and calling for maintenance of the logging moratorium.

New parks law in New South Wales

Two bills affecting National Park management were passed through the NSW Parliament in December.

The National Parks and Wildlife Amendment Act provides clear management objectives for all categories of conservation reserves in NSW. While some of the worst aspects of the legislation were defeated after intense lobbying by conservation groups, the Act

erment refused to adopt environment group amendments in which the legislation would be restricted to the existing resorts Perisher Blue and Thredbo. This increases the threat of ski-resort development to the more remote alpine areas of the park. Past development proposals in KNP were targeted at Leatherbarrel Creek, Twin Valleys and the Brassy Mountains. Conservation groups fear that these areas could again be under threat.

Roger Lembit

Very fishy

Environment groups are gearing up for an intensive campaign to ensure that Victoria's proposed system of marine National Parks and sanctuaries is established in the coming months.

In June 2002 the State government withdrew legislation to establish the parks because it could not reach agreement with the Liberal Party on transitional arrangements for the commercial fishing industry (see Wild no 82).

The State government recently recommitted itself to establishing the parks, the main purpose of which are to protect a representative system of Victoria's marine habitats.

Victoria has a minority government and will need the support of independent MPs or the Liberal Party to get the marine National Parks and sanctuaries legislation through the Lower House. (The National Party is vehemently opposed to the park system.) In the Upper House the Opposition holds a

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substantial majority and could frustrate the passage of the legislation.

Chris Smyth

▲ Act now

The Victorian National Parks Association urges Wild readers to contact their MPs and insist that they support the full implementation of the proposed marine National Parks system in Victoria. Contact Chris Smyth, VNPA's Marine Campaign Officer on 03 9656 9908 or email: chris@vnpa.org.au

Shareholder action sought

The Wilderness Society has launched what it describes as 'an important new element in the campaign to protect Tasmania's old-growth forests'. It is focused on Gunns Ltd, the major wood-chipper in Tasmania, and aims to pursue the company through shareholder action. TWS wants Gunns to agree to a moratorium on wood-chipping forests identified in the Tasmania Together community consultation process.

According to TWS, Tasmania, via Gunns Ltd, is currently exporting record levels of wood-chips. Each year more than 20 000 hectares of Tasmania's native forests are clear-felled, wood-chipped and burnt...and replaced with superfluous plantations.

'For many native birds and animals the destruction of their habitat spells total disaster.'

▲ Act now

Write to the Prime Minister (John Howard, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600) and to the Premier of Tasmania (Jim Bacon, Parliament House, Hobart, Tas 7000) to express strong opposition to logging Tasmania's old-growth forests, the destruction of the habitat of native birds and animals, and the deliberate poisoning of native animals.

WOOD-CHIPS

* **Badja Forest** near Cooma, NSW, is a spectacular old-growth forest which has been under threat from logging for almost a decade, reports TWS. It is identified as a **wilderness area** and **biodiversity hotspot** and it has the highest population of tiger quolls in NSW. The activists who have been camping there to prevent logging have been removed by police and **logging is scheduled to begin any day**.

* A survey in March 2001 found that at present **fewer Australians than ten years ago are concerned about the environment**, reports the *Age* on 23 November 2001. About two thirds of those surveyed were worried about the environment in 2001, compared with roughly three quarters in 1992. Western Australians, South Australians, Queenslanders and Tasmanians had more concerns than those in Victoria and NSW.

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Melbourne's backyard

Forest management issues are coming to a head in the Central Highlands. Recent logging and previews reveal that many areas not previously considered threatened have been placed in an extremely vulnerable situation by the Forest Management Plan (FMP), which is part of the extremely flawed Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). The DNRE is pulling out all the stops to 'ringbark' State- and National Parks and reserves in many parts of Victoria.

Visitors to Lake Mountain Resort last winter would have noticed extensive clear-felling adjacent to the road just inside the resort. A new road still under construction will extend this clear-felled area to within a few hundred metres of Lady Talbot Drive and the Taggerty River. The approaches to the Cathedral Range are also threatened. Many visitors to this popular park do not realise that the southern boundary lies just one kilometre below Sugarloaf Saddle. The beautiful mixed-species forest lining Cerberus Road and the upper (Storm Creek) section of Cathedral valley are zoned for logging. It won't be long

before there is little mature forest remaining that connects the Cathedral Range State Park with the northern (Lake Mountain) section of Yarra Ranges National Park.

Members of Actively Conserving Marysville Environs (ACME) predict that most of the Acheron valley will be clear-felled within the decade. Three new logging roads—one already built, one under construction and a third planned for the near future—are allowing for the systemic harvesting of this beautiful valley. Tourist operators and conservationists agree that if logging continues at the present unsustainable levels, no area outside State and National Parks will be left untouched. Forest management zones are part of an agreement that is not legislated and the zones can be changed at the

discretion of the local forest officer. The fate of these forests in Melbourne's backyard are at the mercy of what is effectively a 'gentlemen's agreement'.

In a letter to ACME dated 3 December 2001 the focus group, comprising representatives from Mystic Mountains Tourism, the timber industry and the DNRE, stated it had unanimously decided that it did not need representation from ACME. Furthermore, Graeme Brown, who is a representative of the focus group, stated that environmental representation was not necessary.

The majority of representatives on the focus group are timber industry and DNRE (forestry) or have strong timber-industry associations.

Michael Hampton

Fort Keppel legal liaison discusses protest protocol with police in Marysville, Victoria. Below, clear-felling in the Acheron valley—a water catchment for the local region and irrigators further afield. Greig



▲ Act now

1. Visit the areas in or near those at risk: Yarra Ranges National Park, Cathedral Ranges State Park, Upper Cathedral valley, Eildon National Park, Lake Mountain and Keppel Creek valley.
2. Write to your local State and federal Members of Parliament to express your concerns.
3. Support the statewide forest campaign by joining an environment group and/or making a donation: ACME, PO Box 84, Marysville, 3779

* A crisis in the **Japanese economy** has pulled the rug out from under the **logging industry in East Gippsland** reports *Wild* correspondent and cartoonist Jill Redwood in the *Potoroo Review*, summer 2001–02. Although the word 'wood-chip' was barely acknowledged in the RFA for East Gippsland, the government admitted that 'low-quality waste' wood accounted for more than two thirds of East Gippsland's log volumes. As Redwood points out, if saw-logs and value-added timber products make up such an important part of the sales of logs from this area, the collapse of the wood-chip

market should not have had a devastating impact on the logging industry.

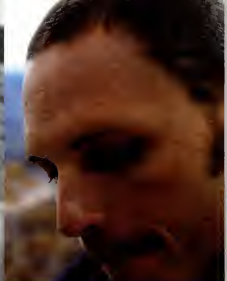
* **Plantation areas in Australia** have almost **doubled** since 1994 according to the Bureau of Rural Statistics. Australia now has one-and-a-half million hectares of plantations, which represents an overall net increase of 42 per cent in seven years. Source: *Potoroo Review*, summer 2001–02

* **TWS** reports that its Brisbane campaign centre has been doing great work on the **Wild Rivers campaign** which has contributed to the preservation of the **Paroo**

River, one of the last wild rivers in Queensland.

* Do you have a large **ecological footprint**? Transport, food, water, materials and waste are apparently the most significant factors to determine the space and resources you consume each year. See www.lead.org and answer 13 quick questions to determine your footprint. For further information, visit the Web site at www.global.mit.edu.au

Readers' contributions to this department, including colour slides, are welcome. Typed items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, VIC 3181.



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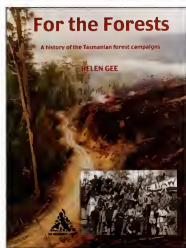
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For the Forests

by Helen Gee (The Wilderness Society, 2001, RRP \$79).

In the 1970s Helen Gee compiled *The South West Book*, a major inspiration for *Wild*. Now she has turned her attention to documenting the campaign for Tasmania's forests.

Tasmania has the tallest hardwood forests on earth. One would think they would be treasured but they are being logged at great loss to the Tasmanian community, both environmentally and financially.



The logging at present takes place under the auspices of Forestry Tasmania, a government business enterprise not accounted for in the budget estimates and which, not being publicly listed, does not have shareholders' meetings in which its operations may be scrutinised and questioned.

And so it has been up to the community to take action. This book tells the story, with contributions about the forests and the campaigns to save them by poets, Aborigines, artists, politicians, photographers, artisans, historians, botanists, novelists, tourism operators and activists. The book is a rich feast for forest lovers, spiced with photos, documents and sketches.

Brian Walters

Day Walks Victoria

by John & Monica Chapman and John Siseman (published by John Chapman, 2001, RRP \$32.95).

When Australia's most experienced track-notes team—all of whom are *Wild* contributors—publishes a book on its own State, chances are that it will be an authoritative work. *Day Walks Victoria* does not disappoint. Indeed, it sets a new standard for this crowded genre.

The 50 selected walks are grouped by region from Bridgewater Lakes in the west to the Bogong High Plains in the east. In addition, many variations are suggested.

While most of the walks are good, the selection only serves to remind the reader of how many other equally good—in some cases better and certainly more challenging—day walks are possible in Victoria. For example, the Grampians walks all follow well-established and mostly well-trodden tracks while the more dramatic possibilities of the Mt Stapylton and Mt Difficult areas, to name just two, are not included.

Printed in full colour throughout, *Day Walks Victoria* is lavishly illustrated with photos and outstanding, full-colour contour maps. Indeed, the maps are a feature of this book and include reference distances that correspond with references in the text. (Even the photos appear beside the relevant section of text!) *Day Walks Victoria* is also distinguished by its rejection of the current trend of including paid advertising.

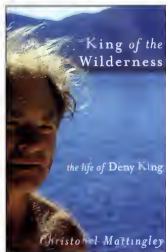
Attention to detail is the phrase that comes to mind when considering *Day Walks Victoria*. The result is a superior product likely to delight thousands of walkers for many years.

Chris Baxter

King of the Wilderness

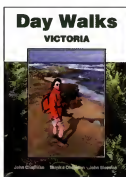
by Christobel Mattingley (The Text Publishing Company, 2001, RRP \$32).

Bush legends don't come any mightier than Deny King. Anyone who has traversed Tassie's south coast by foot or by boat will appreciate the lure of its shores and the true grit of the 'Kings' who made it their realm.



Although King's sudden death in 1991 thwarted plans for an 'oral biography', Christobel Mattingley has assembled a sensitive and at times vividly detailed celebration of this ingenious bushman, tin miner and field naturalist.

An extraordinary frontier childhood and years of hard exploration and war service imbued in King the skills and sturdy mettle



to create a world of his own on the edge of far-flung Melaleuca Lagoon.

For all his brawny exploits, the most telling dimension of this remarkable life is King's abiding empathy for the natural world and the delight he radiated in sharing this passion—be it with his young family or the many bush wanderers who fell under his spell.

Quentin Chester

Top Treks of the World

edited by Steve Razzetti (New Holland, 2001, RRP \$49.95).

Colourful, glossy and superbly photographed, *Top Treks* is an inspiration. While not strictly a 'guidebook', this coffee-table publication describes 29 of the world's great treks and is much more than simply a useful planning tool.

Journeys described include world-famous (as well as some lesser known) treks in the European Alps, Africa, the Himalaya, North and South America, New Zealand and Australia. I found myself planning a trip as soon as I had turned just the first few pages.

Glenn van der Krijff



Tasmania's Offshore Islands

by Nigel Brothers and others (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2001, RRP \$49.95, \$70 hard cover).

This extraordinary, esoteric offering reminds me of the phrase 'a labour of love'. Beautifully produced, with hundreds of colour photos and fascinating maps of each of hundreds of islands, this tome of more than 600 pages will be of particular interest to bird-watchers. Its appeal is also considerable for anyone with an interest in unusual Australian wilderness areas. Nor will those with an interest in the relatively sparse examples of early European activity in the region be disappointed. Sea kayakers and rockclimbers, too, will find something to interest them in *Tasmania's Offshore Islands*.

Information is given for every island regarding the location, survey date, area, status, breeding seabird species observed, vegetation types and, where applicable, mammals and reptiles.

CB





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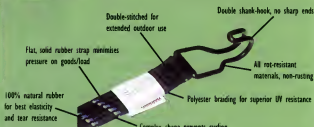
ROK Straps' range of elastic cargo fasteners are perfect for mountain bikes, 4x4s, trailers, caravanning, boating and roof racks - anywhere an item needs securing.

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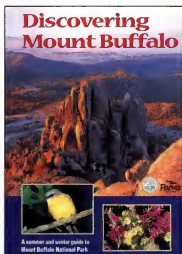
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Discovering the Prom and Discovering Mount Buffalo

[the Prom] revised by Philip Ingamells
(Victorian National Parks Association,
1999, RRP \$12.95); [Mt Buffalo] by
Philip Ingamells (Victorian National
Parks Association, 2001, RRP \$14.95).

These books describe much of the natural
history of each of these parks, which are the
oldest and best known in Victoria. Both in-
clude many historical black-and-white photo-
graphs. The Mt Buffalo book benefits from
a section of colour pages in the middle.



While there are some photographs, much
of the fauna and flora is illustrated with
excellent line drawings. Both books include
brief walking notes to all walking tracks.
Line maps are also provided but they are
extremely basic. In a handy pocket size, the
books are very good value and essential
companions when visiting these parks.

John Chapman

Beyond Adventure

by Colin Mortlock (Cicerone Press,
2001, RRP \$39.95).



The experience of the natural world and its
personal and physical challenges also
prompts an inner journey. Colin Mortlock,
a mountaineer and adventurer, has paused

from his expeditions to reflect on the in-
sights that extended time in the wild can
bring.

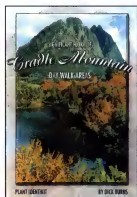
Many of us have experienced glimpses of
understanding as we begin to flow with the
environment during a long trip. In the midst
of his entertaining accounts of great trips,
Mortlock takes us to new inner places.

BW

Significant Flora of Cradle Mountain Day Walk Areas

by Dick Burns (Richmond Concepts
and Print, 2001, RRP \$10.95, available
from the Cradle Mountain Park Shop,
PO Box 20, Sheffield, Tasmania 7360).

I find pocket-sized books irresistible at the
best of times. Zoning in on one area, as this
one does, greatly increases identification suc-
cess by narrowing the field of possibilities.
Every angle is covered to assist in the recog-
nition of more than 40 different plants com-



monly found in Tasmania's Cradle Moun-
tain area. Specific location pointers are
given and confusing species mentioned to
reduce the chance of misidentification.

You certainly don't need to be a 'horti-
cultural freak' to have success using this
'little beauty'.

Sue Baxter

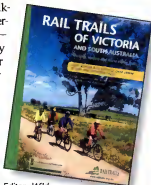
Rail Trails of Victoria and South Australia

by Fiona Colquhoun and others
(Railtrails Australia, second edition
2001, RRP \$35.95 incl p&p from PO
Box 302, East Melbourne, Vic 8002).

If you like your walk-
ing gentle—and prefer-
ably on two wheels—
this professionally
produced, full-colour
book with many
outstanding maps
could be just your
glass of Chardon-
nay. 

CB

Publications for pos-
sible review are wel-
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PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.



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